THE LITERATURE OF CONVERSION:
RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND AND LITERARY ACHIEVEMENT
IN DANTE ALIGHIERI, JOHN BUNYAN, AND JAMES JOYCE

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ABSTRACT

THE LITERATURE OF CONVERSION:
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At the heart of all religious experience is the relationship between a man and God. Such relationships have many varieties and degrees of intimacy. They have beginnings and sometimes endings as well in which the relationship terminates by choice or disaffection. This study is interested mainly in the problem of the beginnings of a person's relationship with God, in what is known as conversion or metanoia. Specifically, it explores the turning point in an artist's life when he undergoes a radical change from unbelief to belief, from apathy to enthusiasm, or from wandering to purpose.

Hidden in the very word "conversion" is the metaphor of "turning to God." The word expresses not so much a physical movement toward God as an inward turning of one's mind and heart. Conversion takes place in a spiritual landscape where one turns to follow God's ways. Conversion, however, does have its outer landscape as well. Religious autobiographies attest to the new lives that result from spiritual changes. Moreover, there are intellectual, moral, and even aesthetic conversions which may accompany a religious turning and thus affect one's whole style of living.

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Thus what begins as a simple experience of God calling one to follow him soon develops into a structure of conversion which affects every aspect of one's life.

Part One of this study examines the theology of conversion which emerges in the Old and New Testaments and in Augustine. This theology emerges in terms of a four-moment structure of conversion. Each moment clusters certain recurring images. Thus the first moment, that of pre-conversion, is always described in terms of wandering, captivity, exile, and so forth. Other characteristic imagery is found to operate in the second moment of God's call, the third of man's response, and the fourth of the new life upon which conversion opens.

Part Two analyzes three major authors who while writing within the Christian matrix describe the conversion experience both autobiographically and fictionally. The three are Dante Alighieri, John Bunyan, and James Joyce: a medieval man, a reformation man, and a modern man. Remarkable is the fact that all three began with autobiographical works from which flowed their fictional masterpieces. Dante wrote the _Vita nuova_ before the _Commedia_, Bunyan _Grace Abounding_ before _Pilgrim's Progress_, and Joyce _Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man_ before _Ulysses_. In the case of each author the structure of his personal conversion—or in the case of James Joyce, his "counter-conversion"—became the structure of his major imaginative work which thus embodied an implicit theology of conversion in literary form.

In the case of an artist, a stylistic or artistic or aesthetic conversion seems to follow in the train of his religious conversion. Moreover, the particular artists studied seem to delineate what might be called a tradition of conversion literature, a genre with characteristics which distinguish it from similar genres: quest romances, novels of education (Bildungsroman), and picaresque novels.

Finally, the symbol of turning toward or away from God, with all its accompanying imagery, so permeates the literature of Augustine, Dante, Bunyan, and Joyce that insight into its theological and literary varieties produces new readings of their works. The readings generated in this study are presented as a possible model for cross-disciplinary work in theology and literature.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The lump of experience, as Mark Schorer explains, precedes the work of art. This lump may be called content, but it is only through what he calls "technique" that such undifferentiated content becomes achieved content, the work of art itself. The artist patterns and structures his experience by means of technique. This for Schorer is paramount:

> When we speak of technique, then, we speak of nearly everything. For technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and finally, of evaluating it.[1]

Religious experience is a particular kind of experience which the artist must pattern and structure. The relationship between a man and God may find its achieved content in an autobiography, a confession, an allegory, a novel, a poem, or a play. The Bible is filled with such varied objectifications of religious experience. But though the canon of biblical literature has been officially closed, the cannonades of autobiographical and fictional works patterning religious experience continue to explode around us.

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[1] "Technique as Discovery," in Forms of Modern Fiction, ed. William Van O'Connor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, A Midland Book, 1959), p. 9. As can be seen by the context, Schorer is using "technique" in a more pervasive sense than we are used to. Elsewhere he says that "everything is technique which is not the lump of experience itself" (p. 11).

At the heart of all religious experience is the relationship between a man and God. Such relationships have many varieties and degrees of intimacy. They have beginnings; sometimes endings as well, in which the relationship terminates by choice or disaffection. In this study I am interested mainly in the beginnings of a person's relationship with God, in what is known as conversion or metanoia. Specifically, I wish to explore the turning point in an artist's life when he undergoes a radical change from unbelief to belief, from apathy to enthusiasm, or from wandering to purpose.

Hidden in the very word "conversion" is the metaphor of "turning to God." We sense in the word not so much a physical movement toward God as an inward turning of one's mind and heart. Conversion takes place in a spiritual landscape where we turn to follow God's ways. Conversion, however, does have its outer landscape as well. Religious autobiographies attest to the new lives that result from spiritual changes. Moreover, there are intellectual, moral, and even aesthetic conversions which may accompany a religious turning and thus affect one's whole style of living. Thus what begins as a simple experience of God calling one to follow him soon develops into a structure of conversion which affects every aspect of one's life.

In this study I will first examine the theology of conversion which emerges in the Old and New Testaments and in Augustine. Then I will analyze three major authors who while writing within the Christian matrix describe the conversion experience both autobiographically and fictionally. The three are Dante Alighieri, John Bunyan, and James Joyce: the first a medieval man, the second a reformation, and the third a modern. Remarkable is the fact that all three began with autobiographical works from which flowed their fictional masterpieces. Dante wrote the _Vita nuova_ before the _Commedia_, Bunyan _Grace Abounding_ before _Pilgrim's Progress_, and Joyce _Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man_ before _Ulysses_. In the case of each author the structure of his personal conversion seemed to become the structure of his major imaginative work which thus embodied an implicit theology of conversion in literary form.

What A. C. Charity says about the centrality of conversion in Dante can be applied to Bunyan as well:

> The Divine Comedy is a poem about conversion. It is, no doubt, incidentally about much else. But that is its main subject: becoming a Christian. The poem being directed (in current parlance, one might say 'geared') to the conversion of the world, or society, or his readers, its author works out his purpose as best he can and as, perhaps, he best can, by narrating his own.[1]

I believe conversion is central to Joyce also, but in his case there is a turning from rather than a turning toward God. Thus his inclusion in this study is important for analyzing what we will call a counter-conversion.

The fact is that though there has been much published on the theology of conversion, especially as developed in the Old and New Testaments and commented on by the Fathers, there has been almost no criticism of literature in terms of metanoia. William James adverts to the conversion experiences of Bunyan and Tolstoy in his book The Varieties of Religious Experience, but he treats their autobiographical accounts of conversion as if these provided literally true data.[2] He has no sensitivity for the technique that patterns and structures such accounts into works of art.

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[1] Events and their Afterlife: The Dialectics of Christian Typology in the Bible and Dante (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 167.

[2] The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (New York: Collier Books, 1961), pp. 130-58 passim.

Erich Auerbach provides an example of the critic who possesses the needed sensitivity to technique. Although he does not deal with metanoia in his remarkable book Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature,[1] his ability to analyze literary passages from the standpoints of history, aesthetics, and comparative literatures shows that such a study as we are undertaking is not only possible but necessary. With an eye on his achievement, we can avoid the potential danger of not recognizing the vital difference between religious experience on the one hand, and a literary patterning of it on the other. Literature, be it autobiography or fiction, uses as we said before the lump of experience as content and shapes it by technique into the achieved content of the work of art. Autobiography, it is true, presents experience more literally than does fiction, but it is patterned and structured by technique all the same. If we remember this fact, we will keep religious experience and an imaginative patterning of it distinct.

One final danger seems immanent in a study such as we are beginning, a study which requires us to be commuters between theology and literature. A bridge must be thrown across the troubled waters which separate

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[1] Trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

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these two headlands. The danger is that we end with only a pier—what Stephen Dedalus calls a "disappointed bridge"—and find ourselves stranded on one side or the other. Hopefully, our analysis of the importance of conversion as theme and plot in Dante, Bunyan, and Joyce will lead to readings of all three authors which cannot ignore their religious thought and imagery. Thus, the bridge between theology and literature will prove to be in the works themselves and not in any imposed critique of our own.

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PART I

THE THEOLOGY OF CONVERSION

CHAPTER I

CONVERSION AND ITS OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS

Man has always grappled with religious choices. Which gods must he appease and which rites perform to insure such appeasement? Such choices demanded not belief so much as action. And when some new form of worship was introduced by conquerors or by conquered peoples brought home as slaves, the common practice—as A. D. Nock points out—was to incorporate these new deities and rites into the traditional system of worship. Nock calls this acceptance of new forms of worship "adhesion" because the rites were supplements and not substitutes for the traditional religious practices. Since there was no new way of life demanded, he distinguishes adhesion from the concept of conversion:

> By conversion we mean the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right.[1]

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[1] Conversion: The Old and New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 7.

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Nock goes on to show that conversion is unique to Judaism and Christianity. It was only when Christianity became dominant that a genuine conversion to paganism was possible, and then only because a radical change of life was demanded in contrast and opposition to Christianity. This however was a phenomenon unknown until the fourth and fifth centuries after Christ. Previously only Judaism and Christianity of all the world religions demanded conversion, that radical change of life which precluded all other gods and worship in contrast with the pagan adhesion to many gods and cults.

Thus we gaze down on an ocean of religious syncretism in which one island begins pushing up its headlands. It is clearly a new phenomenon in the geography of religions. Nock defines its borders:

> Judaism and Christianity demanded renunciation and a new start. They demanded not merely acceptance of a rite, but the adhesion of the will to a theology, in a word faith, a new life in a new people.[1]

We must now explore the new theology which demanded such complete acceptance, an adhesion to a new life instead of just to another cult. This will entail a discussion of the theology of conversion as developed in the Old Testament, fulfilled in the New, and described in Augustine's Confessions. Thus we will progress from theological treatments of conversion in the Bible to a more imaginative shaping of the conversion experience in Augustine. This will be our initial bridge thrown up between theology and literature.

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[1] Ibid., p. 14.

Covenant

The concept of covenant is the backdrop against which the whole drama of the Old Testament is played out. But while the concept itself appears at first sight to be painted in bold strokes, upon closer examination the canvas reveals more subtle brushing.

Covenant is an analogy for the relationship between God and his people. It is based upon the fact that in the Near Eastern world mutual agreements were solemnly contracted in covenants. John L. McKenzie has shown that the covenant analogy of the relationship between God and Israel is basic to several other analogies which refer to this relationship, i.e. the analogies of father-son, husband-wife, shepherd-flock, king-subject, and kinsmen (God as the "avenger" of Israel).[1] The metaphor of conversion, turning to God, as a renewal of the relationship between God and Israel is also rooted in the analogy of covenant.

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[1] "Aspects of Old Testament Thought," in The Jerome Biblical Commentary, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 77: 75-76. Hereafter abbreviated JBC.

The covenant formula, "I will be your God, and you will be my people," is writ large above the history of Israel. But studies into the covenant formulae and obligations current among Near Eastern peoples have clarified the fact that the covenant contract was a complicated and varied form.

Consider, for example, the best known covenant in the Old Testament: the covenant at Sinai. Many scholars maintain that this is the oldest covenant agreement recorded in the Bible. Christopher R. North isolates three verses in Exodus as the most primitive expression of it:

> Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel. They saw the God of Israel beneath whose feet there was, it seemed, a sapphire pavement pure as the heavens themselves. He laid no hand on these notables of the sons of Israel: they gazed on God. They ate and they drank. (24:9-11)[1]

G. E. Mendenhall, on the other hand, points to the covenant of Abraham as showing even earlier roots in the biblical tradition.[2] But despite the unresolvable problems surrounding the dating of the two covenants, the one at Sinai seems at first sight to be more central to the theology of the Old Testament. This Mosaic covenant obliges both sides, God and the people, to certain conditions:

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[1] The Old Testament Interpretation of History (London: Epworth Press, 1946), p. 30.

[2] Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 1964 ed., s. v. "Covenant," 1:718. Hereafter abbreviated IDB.

> Moses then went up to God, and Yahweh called to him from the mountain, saying, "Say this to the House of Jacob, declare this to the sons of Israel, 'You yourselves have seen what I did with the Egyptians, how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. From this you know that now, if you obey my voice and hold fast to my covenant, you of all the nations shall be my very own for all the earth is mine. I will count you a kingdom of priests, a consecrated nation.' Those are the words you are to speak to the sons of Israel." So Moses went and summoned the elders of the people, putting before them all that Yahweh had bidden him. Then all the people answered as one, "All that Yahweh has said, we will do." And Moses took the people's reply back to Yahweh. (Ex 19: 3-8)

God makes his promises, the people respond with theirs: "All that Yahweh has said, we will do." The conditions, then, of the Mosaic covenant are that the people will obey the Law of God and that God will make them a consecrated nation and give them the Land of Canaan as a gift. One of the earliest biblical credos makes confession of this covenant:

> In times to come, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the decrees and the laws and customs that Yahweh our God has laid down for you?" you shall tell your son, "Once we were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt by his mighty hand. Before our eyes Yahweh worked great and terrible signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his House. And he brought us out from there to lead us into the land he swore to our fathers he would give to us. And

> Yahweh commanded us to observe all these laws and to fear Yahweh our God, so as to be happy for ever and to live, as he has granted us to do until now. For us right living will mean this: to keep and observe all these commandments before Yahweh our God as he has directed us." (Dt 6:20-25)

Here we see God's election of the people objectified in the exodus from Egypt, the greatest event in the Old Testament, the greatest of the magnalia Dei, the saving deeds of God. The event includes God's election of the people, his covenant with them at Sinai, and the gift of the Promised Land through the conquest of Canaan.

Once this conquest has been completed, the covenant is renewed. The account of the covenant at Shechem found in Joshua 24 comprises one of the most complete examples of a suzerainty covenant found in the Old Testament. It is introduced with Joshua recounting the works God has performed for the tribes of Israel. His last and greatest work has been to lead their ancestors out of Egypt and into a new land: "I gave you a land where you never toiled, you live in towns you never built; you eat now from vineyards and olivegroves you never planted." (24:13) The account opens with Joshua saying:

> So now, fear Yahweh and serve him perfectly and sincerely; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve Yahweh. But if you do not serve Yahweh, choose today whom you wish to serve, whether the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are now living.

> As for me and my House, we will serve Yahweh.
> (24:14-15)

The people have received an invitation which they can either accept or reject. They react immediately:

> We have no intention of deserting Yahweh and serving other gods! Was it not Yahweh our God who brought us and our ancestors out of the land of Egypt, the house of slavery, who worked those great wonders before our eyes and preserved us all along the way we travelled and among all the peoples through whom we journeyed? What is more, Yahweh drove all those peoples out before us, as well as the Amorites who used to live in this country. We too will serve Yahweh, for he is our God. (24:16-18)

The people see only one side of the struggle, the works Yahweh has done in their behalf. Joshua is quick to present the full implications of accepting Yahweh as their God:

> You cannot serve Yahweh, because he is a holy God, he is a jealous God who will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you desert Yahweh to follow alien gods he in turn will afflict and destroy you after the goodness he has shown you. (24:19-20)

Joshua makes it clear that to choose Yahweh involves a new responsibility, one for which Yahweh will hold the people accountable. The people make their decision, and their acceptance makes the covenant at Shechem a success:

> The people answered Joshua, "No; it is Yahweh we wish to serve." Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen Yahweh, to serve him." They answered, "We are witnesses." "Then cast away the alien gods among you and give your hearts to Yahweh the God of Israel!" The people answered Joshua, "It is Yahweh

> our God we choose to serve; it is his voice that we will obey."
>
> That day, Joshua made a covenant for the people; he laid down a statute and ordinance for them at Shechem. Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a great stone and set it up there, under the oak in the sanctuary of Yahweh, and Joshua said to all the people, "See! This stone shall be a witness against us because it has heard all the words that Yahweh has spoken to us; it shall be a witness against you in case you deny your God." Then Joshua sent the people away, and each returned to his own inheritance. (24:21-28)

The structure of the episode can be summarized as (1) an election or invitation by Yahweh, (2) a decision by the people, and (3) the establishment of a covenant between Yahweh and his people with certain conditions on both sides. This is not the place to go into Mendenhall's work upon the structure of the Hittite suzerainty treaties. It is enough to say that several covenant elements are found in this sequence, namely the I-thou form of address, the recital of saving deeds, the stipulation to renounce other gods, the reference to the people themselves as witnesses, and the provisions for writing and depositing the covenant in a sanctuary. More important for this study is the recognition that within the elements of the suzerainty covenant is the structure of a man's or a people's turning to God, the structure of conversion.

An essential aspect of the structure of the covenant, and of conversion also, is election. As we

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regard election, that is, as conditional or conditionless, so we must regard the concept of covenant itself. Jakob Jocz comments on the two possibilities:

> Election has nothing to do with favoritism; it is "summons to a task exacting and unceasing." But at the same time we must not lose sight of the irrational nature of election as far as man is concerned: there is nothing within man himself that warrants God's grace—it is utterly gratuitous. Election means that God binds Himself to man, and that His covenant-keeping loyalty is historically demonstrated by His attitude to Israel. It is for this reason that we must insist upon a conditionless covenant: unless the covenant is conditionless election depends upon merit.[1]

Here is the problem of God's call, whether we are considering God's election of the people to the covenant or his call of the individual to conversion. The call is based either upon merit or upon the free gift of grace. It is more than coincidence that God's call comes so often in the wilderness, that existential moment when no human actions can come to anything. The prophets develop this theme at length, looking back to the exodus experience as a period of childlike innocence for Israel when they knew only God's guidance in the cloud, ignoring all other gods, the journey becoming almost a spiritual idyll.[2]

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[1] The Covenant: A Theology of Human Destiny (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968), p. 42.

[2] See Hos 2:16, 11:1-4; Amos 5:25, 12:10; Jer 2:2-3, 31:2.

If one considers election to be conditional, and thus merited in some way, then the Law becomes paramount. The covenant becomes based on the Law, not upon the free gift of God's grace. The cultic rites take on more prominence and their performance an _ex opere operato_ character. As Walther Eichrodt points out repeatedly, the conditional covenant yields a _Do ut des_ religion.[1]

The Mosaic covenant was just such a conditional covenant, based upon a bilateral agreement between God and his people. However, there is another covenant tradition in the Old Testament, that of a unilateral promise of God with no conditions imposed upon his people. We find such conditionless covenants made with Abraham, Noah, and David.

It is worthwhile to quote at length from the first account of the Abrahamic covenant (from the Yahwistic tradition) because of its description of the ancient rite of covenant in which the parties—here God only, emphasizing the unilateral nature of the agreement—pass between the parts of slain animals. Noteworthy also is the heightened awareness of the free gift of God's grace in his promises.

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[1] _Theology of the Old Testament_, trans. J. A. Baker, 2 vols. (London: SCM Press, 1961), 1:52.

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It happened some time later that the word of Yahweh was spoken to Abram in a vision, "Have no fear, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great."

"My Lord Yahweh," Abram replied, "what do you intend to give me? I go childless . . ." Then Abram said, "See, you have given me no descendants; some man of my household will be my heir." And then this word of Yahweh was spoken to him, "He shall not be your heir; your heir shall be of your own flesh and blood." Then taking him outside he said, "Look up to heaven and count the stars if you can. Such will be your descendants" he told him. Abram put his faith in Yahweh, who counted this as making him justified.

"I am Yahweh," he said to him "who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldaeans to make you heir to this land." "My Lord Yahweh," Abram replied, "how am I to know that I shall inherit it?" He said to him, "Get me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon." He brought him all these, cut them in half and put half on one side and half facing it on the other; but the birds he did not cut in half. Birds of prey came down on the carcasses but Abram drove them off.

Now as the sun was setting Abram fell into a deep sleep, and terror seized him. Then Yahweh said to Abram, "Know this for certain, that your descendants will be exiles in a land not their own, where they will be slaves and oppressed for four hundred years. But I will pass judgment also on the nation that enslaves them and after that they will leave, with many possessions. For your part, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a ripe old age. In the fourth generation they will come back here, for the wickedness of the Amorites is not yet ended."

When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, there appeared a smoking furnace and a firebrand that went between the halves. That day Yahweh made a Covenant with Abram in these terms:

> "To your descendants I give this land,
> from the wadi of Egypt to the Great River,
>
> the river Euphrates, the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites." (Gen 15)

Both Paul and James will comment on the sentence, "Abram put his faith in Yahweh, who counted this as making him justified."[1] Paul will use it to prove that justification comes from the gift of faith, not from the works of the Law (Rm 4; Gal 3:6f). James will quote the same text to condemn faith that is "dead" because it does not perform the works that flow from it (Jm 2:23). In this way the Old Testament tension between conditional and conditionless covenants develops into the New Testament and Reformation controversies between faith and works.

The second narrative of the Abrahamic covenant, this one from the Priestly tradition, adds the element of circumcision.

> When Abram was ninety-nine years old
> Yahweh appeared to him and said, "I am El

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[1] This translation of Gen 15:6 from the Jerusalem Bible reveals the Catholic position in the Reformation debate on justification. The Revised Standard Version provides a translation more amenable to the Protestant tradition: "And he believed in the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness." The difference between the two translations has vast implications in the theology of justification, but does not directly affect our present discussion of conditional and conditionless covenants.

> Shaddai. Bear yourself blameless in my presence, and I will make a Covenant between myself and you, and increase your numbers greatly."
>
> Abram bowed to the ground and God said this to him, "Here now is my covenant with you: you shall become the father of a multitude of nations. You shall no longer be called Abram; your name shall be Abraham, for I make you father of a multitude of nations. I will make you most fruitful. I will make you into nations, and your issue shall be kings. I will establish my Covenant between myself and you, and your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land you are living in, the whole land of Canaan, to own in perpetuity, and I will be your God."
>
> God said to Abraham, "You on your part shall maintain my Covenant, yourself and your descendants after you, generation after generation. Now this is my Covenant which you are to maintain between myself and you, and your descendants after you: all your males must be circumcised. You shall circumcise your foreskin, and this shall be the sign of the Covenant between myself and you. When they are eight days old all your male children must be circumcised, generation after generation of them, no matter whether they be born within the household or bought from a foreigner not one of your descendants. They must always be circumcised, both those born within the household and those who have been bought. My Covenant shall be marked on your bodies as a Covenant in perpetuity. The uncircumcised male, whose foreskin has not been circumcised, such a man shall be cut off from his people: he has violated my Covenant."
> (Gen 17:1-14)

At first reading the injunction of circumcision seems to be a condition of the covenant itself, the one obligation to which Abraham must bind himself and his descendants if the covenant is to be ratified. The text makes it clear, however, that circumcision is a "sign of the covenant" just as the rainbow in the sky is the sign of God's covenant with Noah.

There is no question about the Noachite covenant being anything but conditionless and unilateral. Mendenhall thinks that the Priestly narrator modeled it on the Abrahamic covenant which we have just considered. Thus the lengthy discussion of the rainbow as sign clarifies the function of circumcision as sign in the covenant with Abraham:

> God spoke to Noah and his sons, "See, I establish my Covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; also with every living creature to be found with you, birds, cattle and every wild beast with you: everything that came out of the ark, everything that lives on the earth. I establish my Covenant with you: no thing of flesh shall be swept away again by the waters of the flood. There shall be no flood to destroy the earth again."
>
> God said, "Here is a sign of the Covenant I make between myself and you and every living creature with you for all generations. I set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the Covenant between me and the earth. When I gather the clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, I will recall the Covenant between myself and you and every living creature of every kind. And so the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all things of flesh. When the bow is in the clouds I shall see it and call to mind the lasting Covenant between God and every living creature of every kind that is found on the earth."
>
> God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the Covenant I have established between myself and every living thing that is found on the earth." (Gen 9:8-17)

The rainbow is a sign and a guarantee of the covenant in this account as well as in that of the Abrahamic covenant. Mendenhall judges that this connection of covenant and sign comes late in Old Testament history.[1] If this is true, there is all the more reason to insist on the conditionless character of both covenants.

More important than the Noachite is the Davidic covenant. Several sources mention it, but the most striking comes in the last words of David:

> Yes, my House stands firm with God:
> he has made an everlasting covenant with me,
> all in order, well assured;
> does he not bring to flower all that saves me,
> all I desire? (2 Sam 23:5; cf. 2 Sam 3:9; Ps 89:3, 28-29; 110:4)

The promises of the covenant, though the narration of them does not use the word "covenant" at all, comes through the prophet Nathan:

> Yahweh Sabaoth says this: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be leader of my people Israel; I have been with you on all your expeditions; I have cut off all your enemies before you. I will give you fame as great as the fame of the greatest on earth. I will provide a place for my people Israel; I will plant them there and they shall dwell in that place and never be disturbed again; nor shall the wicked continue to oppress them as they did, in the days when I appointed judges over my people Israel; I will give them rest from all their enemies. Yahweh will make you great; Yahweh will make you a House. And when your days are

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[1] __IDB__, 1:718.

> ended and you are laid to rest with your
> ancestors, I will preserve the offspring
> of your body after you and make his sovereignty
> secure. (It is he who shall build a house for
> my name, and I will make his royal throne secure for ever.) I will be a father to him and
> he a son to me; if he does evil, I will punish
> him with the rod such as men use, with strokes
> such as mankind gives. Yet I will not withdraw
> my favour from him, as I withdrew it from your
> predecessor. Your House and your sovereignty
> will always stand secure before me and your
> throne be established for ever. (2 Sam 7:8-16)

This covenant is formally very similar to the Abrahamic. Especially noticeable is the insistence upon election as the free gift of God's grace. It is finally this free and conditionless nature of God's unilateral covenants with Abraham, Noah, and David which marks the radical difference between them and the bilateral Mosaic covenant. In the latter, the election of the exodus became entangled with the Law and cultic rituals. The people's response seemed at times to overshadow God's grace and sometimes even to merit it.

These two traditions of conditional and conditionless covenants develop quite separately in the Old Testament until the covenant of Ezra. Here the leaders, Levites, and priests put their names to a document which binds the people to "undertake, under curse and oath, to walk according to the Law of God given through Moses, the servant of God, and to observe and practice all the commandments of Yahweh our Lord, his customs and his laws." (Neh 10:29) In this covenant both covenantal traditions seem to fall together, as Mendenhall explains:

> Yahweh is bound by the covenant with Abraham; and Israel is bound by the Sinai covenant as expanded in the collected law codes, now enforced by the political authority of the Jewish state. Henceforth, the primary problem is that of hermeneutics, of interpreting the Scriptures, which are final authority. History itself comes to an end with the Chronicler; no further historical work became canonical. The law was final; all that remained was securing obedience to it, and its adaptation to changes in outward circumstances.[1]

This seems to be the only solution possible to the contradiction between God's sovereignty and man's free will. God freely elects and gives his grace; man responds and submits himself to obligations. On God's side the covenant is unilateral; on man's, bilateral. This is one answer to the paradox of grace and free will. Another is the concept of *ḥesed*, God's covenant love for his chosen people. God remains faithful to his promises in spite of their sins. His love is not dependent on or conditioned by their response.

New Covenant

This "utter faithfulness of the God of Israel" is proclaimed in ringing voices by the prophets; so ringingly that one scholar has concluded that "the idea of a conditionless covenant is an *innovation* and is of prophetic provenance."[1] Whether this is so or not, there remains the fact that the prophetic writings affected radical changes in the concept of covenant.

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[1] Ibid., p. 721.

The first hint that there was a shift in the understanding of the covenant concept comes in a reading of the classical prophets of the eighth century (Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah 1-39). We are startled to find that in them there is no explicit mention of covenant. How can this be in light of our statement that covenantal thought is at the root of biblical thinking and that biblical theology is based on the premise of a covenant between God and Israel? Mendenhall has suggested one reason, which McKenzie sums up thus:

> In the kingdom of Judah the covenant of Israel had been largely supplanted by the covenant of Yahweh with the house of David. Plainly the secessionist Israelites of the North felt no guilt about a breach of the Davidic covenant; but even in Judah the covenant with David became a pledge to the dynasty of David rather than to the people of Israel. In the early traditions Yahweh had made no such commitment; and prophets avoided the word covenant lest the reality of Israel be conditioned on the survival of the dynasty of David.[2]

Eichrodt takes a different tack. He notes that the basic themes of covenant theology were present in the classical prophets even though covenant was not

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[1] Jocz, p. 27.

[2] JBC, 77:84.

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explicitly mentioned: "Amos, Isaiah and Micah all present it as an accepted fact that Israel's relationship with Yahweh is based on the latter's own free decision and inconceivable grace."[1]

But if the themes of covenant theology are present, why such obvious rejection of the word "covenant"? Again we must turn to Eichrodt, for whom covenant was the basic category unifying the Bible:

> We must take into consideration the whole position of the prophets *vis-à-vis* the spiritual stock-in-trade of their nation; and when this is done, the factor of decisive significance is seen to be that these reforming spirits have set themselves to oppose every instance of dead externalism in religious practice and mechanical routine in religious thought. What confronted them was an insistence on statutes and ordinances, on settled custom and usage, on the precisely organized performance of duties toward God, and a corresponding reckoning on Yahweh's automatic performance in return. An Amos inveighs strenuously against the unwearying processions and pilgrimages to famous sanctuaries and the sumptuous Temple worship; a Hosea castigates the priests for making money out of the people's sense of sin and for getting fat on their offerings; an Isaiah stigmatizes the eager frequenting of the Temple and the magnificent prayers there offered as the 'commandment of men.' In all of them the stress is on the personal note in the relationship to Yahweh; it is because they find this lacking that they insist with all the force and passion at their command on the ideas of honesty, of love, of surrender. Correspondingly they present Yahweh's acts as the operations of a fully personal loyalty, which courts the

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[1] Eichrodt, 1:51.

> trust of the people with living warmth of feeling and looks for a response that is spontaneous and from the heart. In this struggle to eradicate all thought of an *opus operatum* the concept of the covenant could not help them; for, as we noticed earlier, the weakness inherent in it which made it a potential danger to religious life was precisely its legal character, because of which it was liable to become the seedbed of a parasitic '*Do ut des*' religion.[1]

R. E. Clements prefers to state, perhaps too strongly, that the reason for the lack of covenant terminology in the classical prophets is due to the fact that the covenant had been terminated. God has taken the radical step of breaking off his covenantal relationship with Israel because of the people's wholesale failure to carry out their obligations.[2] The covenant may not have been actually terminated, but it was clear to the prophets that it was endangered. The God of the covenant had come to be regarded as a deity obliged to respond to the people's needs. His dominion could be reaffirmed only by appealing to his election of Israel in the exodus event with its promise of deliverance and God's free gift of grace. Thus the prophets began to speak of a new exodus in which God would deliver his people from their plight.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 51-52.

[2] *Prophecy and Covenant* (London: SCM Press, 1965), pp. 40ff, 50, and 69.

The call of the prophets for a new exodus underlines the radical change which was needed if the people were to return to a viable relationship with God. This relationship could not be built upon the old covenant. No, besides a new exodus there must be a new covenant. Jeremiah is the first to proclaim it:

> See, the days are coming—it is Yahweh who speaks—when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel (and the House of Judah), but not a covenant like the one I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant of mine, so I had to show them who was master. It is Yahweh who speaks. No, this is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel when those days arrive—it is Yahweh who speaks. Deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts. Then I will be their God and they shall be my people. There will be no further need for neighbor to try to teach neighbor, or brother to say to brother, "Learn to know Yahweh!" No, they will all know me, the least no less than the greatest—it is Yahweh who speaks—since I will forgive their iniquity and never call their sin to mind. (31:31-34)

This covenant was new on several counts. First, it insisted on individual responsibility and retribution in the verse just preceding: "Each is to die for his own sin." Second, it emphasized God's spontaneous forgiveness of sins. There was no more question of a do ut des religion in this new formulation. God's mercy was conditionless. Third, it cut through external subservience to the Law by stressing the interiorization of religion. Man would undergo a change of heart in which he would change both morally and intellectually. He would both act and know in a radically new way.

Conversion

Jeremiah repeats this prophecy of a new covenant in the next chapter. But this time with a concept we have not yet discussed, the concept which is at the heart of this study: conversion.

> Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation; I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul. (32:37-41)

This passage is remarkable. It expresses the summit of God's conditionless, unilateral election of his people. Only six other times in the Bible is God characterized as the subject of conversion. William L. Holladay points out that this is the "only one in which God's change of relationship is not contingent upon what Israel does, or on how Israel changes her relationship to God."[1]

The Hebrew word normally used to express the change of relationship between God and Israel was _šûbh_. It literally meant "return, turn back, go back, come back." But in the prophetic books it came to take on what Holladay calls a "covenantal" usage, "expressing a change of loyalty on the part of Israel or God, each for the other."[2] This concept of conversion and apostasy, rooted as it was in the covenant tradition, yet pointing to a new relationship between God and man, became a basic theme in the prophetic writings.

This is not to say that we find the concept of conversion only in the prophets. There had been pre-prophetic teaching on conversion, but only in isolated instances. Furthermore, Amos uses the concept without any explanation of its meaning, which seems to indicate that it was in current usage. But whatever its currency at the beginning of the prophetic period, it was left to the prophets themselves, and especially Jeremiah, to develop the theology of conversion.

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[1] _The Root Šûbh in the Old Testament: With Particular Reference to its Usages in Covenantal Contexts_ (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1958), p. 119.

[2] Ibid., p. 2.

Jeremiah, more than any other of the prophets, recognized that the problem of conversion was tied up with its Hebrew expression šûbh. In a single passage he illuminated the word in all its meanings:

> When men fall, do they not rise again? If one turns away, does he not return? Why then has this people turned away in perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return. I have given heed and listened, but they have not spoken aright; no man repents of his wickedness, saying, "What have I done?" Everyone turns to his own course, like a horse plunging headlong into battle. (8:4-6)

Emphasized here is the possibility of the people turning both ways: toward and away from God. The same word serves to express conversion and apostasy. According to Holladay, the expression "return" was for Jeremiah

> the key to Israel's need before Yahweh, so it gained a technical sense, 'repent.' But 'returning' can take place in two directions, and the nation can return to evil, too; and he uses the verb . . . with this in mind. And a verb with such a double face means really just this: 'change one's loyalty.'[1]

We must rely on Holladay and his exhaustive study of the covenantal uses of šûbh for a summary of Jeremiah's breakthrough in the use of the word:

> He saw apostasy and repentance as correlative; he did not generalize each process separately—apostasy, repentance—as we with our philosophical abstractions would be prone to do: he saw them as aspects of the same act; a changeable people must change; it has changed enough, it must change. And that the

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[1] Ibid., p. 152.

> heart may change in both directions is a tremendous discovery, and it is to the merit of Jeremiah that he saw this clearly and explored the potentialities of the idea to its limit, using a word, deepening the word, and carving out an idea with the word, an idea which left Jewish thinking enriched in all the years thereafter.[1]

Throughout his writings Jeremiah seems to consider that all prophetic activity is finally ordered to exhorting the people to conversion: "I have sent you all my servants the prophets so persistently, so often, to say: Each of you turn from your evil way, and amend your actions, do not follow alien gods and serve them." (35:15) Jeremiah differs from Amos and Hosea inasmuch as he thinks such a radical change is possible in the lives of the people.

Amos preached the need for conversion without seeing any great possibility of it actually taking place. The refrain, "yet you did not return to me," typifies his attitude (4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11). Hosea put a penitential prayer in the mouths of the people: "Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn, that he may heal us; he has stricken, and he will bind us up." (6:1) Yet it is a shortlived return, and despite God's *ḥesed* they soon turn back to their former ways: "Yahweh gives his love . . . though they turn to other gods." (3:1) In fact, Hosea considers

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[1] Ibid., p. 157.

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conversion almost impossible because of their impenitence: "Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God." (5:4)

Jeremiah saw the possibility of conversion as rooted in the very nature of an ever-faithful God who could say "Return, O faithless sons, and I will heal your faithlessness." (3:22) This is the central mystery of conversion, that it is solely the work of God. Just as he will write his Law in the hearts of men, so will he make the heart respond to his converting grace.

How does God effect conversion in his people? What is the structure that emerges from the experience of radically changing one's relationship with God? The discrete moments within this experience of conversion can be examined in the long poem of chapters 3 and 4 of Jeremiah in which the theme of God's marriage contract with his people is explored. Since it is a poem, the structure of conversion is not linear as in narrative, but rather discernable through the repetition of themes and motifs. The first is that the people, Yahweh's bride, has sinned and become a prostitute:

> . . . like a woman betraying her lover,
> the House of Israel has betrayed me—
> it is Yahweh who speaks.
> A noise is heard on the bare heights:
> the weeping and entreaty of the sons of Israel,

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> because they have gone so wildly astray,
> and forgotten Yahweh their God. (3:20-21)

In the midst of this sin, Yahweh calls his people:

> Return, disloyal Israel—it is Yahweh who speaks—
> I shall frown on you no more,
> since I am merciful—it is Yahweh who speaks.
> I shall not keep my resentment for ever. (3:12)

The people are called to make a decision. The call is to return (be converted) and to do what Yahweh, the bridegroom, requires:

> If you wish to return, Israel—It is Yahweh who
> speaks—
> it is to me you must return.
> Do away with your abominations
> and you will have no need to avoid me.
> If you swear, "As Yahweh lives!"
> truthfully, justly, honestly,
> the nations will bless themselves by you,
> and glory in you.
> For thus speaks Yahweh
> to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of
> Jerusalem:
> Clean your ground thoroughly,
> sow nothing among thorns.
> Circumcise yourselves for Yahweh: off with the
> foreskin of your hearts
> (men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem),
> lest my wrath should leap out like a fire,
> and burn with no one to quench it,
> in return for the wickedness of your deeds. (4:1-4)

The result of this returning to Yahweh will be a renewal of the former state of affairs between God and his people before they sold themselves into prostitution:

> How I wanted to rank you with my sons,
> and give you a country of delights,
> the fairest heritage of all the nations!
> I had thought you would call me: My father,
> and would never cease to follow me. (3:19)

In this poem a structure of conversion emerges, a structure quite similar to that found in the covenantal relationship. We can identify four moments which express the experience of the people's turning to God: (1) the state of sin and wandering, (2) God's call, (3) the people's decision to respond to God's call, and (4) entrance into a new life, here the renewal of the marriage-contract and (in a mixture of metaphor) sonship with the father.

Jeremiah's recognition of the possibility of conversion and its structure, as well as his constant theologizing upon it, could probably be traced back to his own firsthand struggle with conversion. Like Paul after him, this subjective or autobiographical aspect keeps intruding itself into his preaching on the divine purpose of forgiveness. He recognizes God as the one who must work out his conversion: "Heal me, Yahweh, and I shall be really healed, save me, and I shall be saved, for you alone are my hope." (17:14) Jeremiah's preaching, in turn, will flow from his conversion: "If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth." (15:19)

Finally, Jeremiah's personal experience of conversion leads him to appeal to other individuals to be converted. Where before, conversion like covenant was always the action of the people as a community, now it becomes the action of individuals changing their loyalty and turning to God in a personal relationship. Eichrodt points out that "even when he is addressing the nation, he directs his strongest appeal to the individual—a fact which is betrayed quite involuntarily by the incorporation of the word ʾ*īš*, 'each one,' into his collective address."[1] Like a refrain he exhorts: "Turn back, each of you, from your evil way." (25:5; cf. 26:3, 35:15, 36:37)

In Deutero-Isaiah the note of universality was added to the conversion tradition: "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth" (45:22). A second development is found in the passage, "Return to me, for I have redeemed you" (44:22). Here conversion is first conceived of as the result of deliverance, not vice versa. The negative element of turning away from sin which we found in Hosea disappears and a positive turning to God takes its place.

Yet beyond these two innovations, and with the exception of Psalm 51, the concept of conversion deteriorated in the exilic and post-exilic writings. In fact, Psalm 51 might be considered a last ringing of the bell that sounded the greatest celebration of conversion theology in the Old Testament:

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[1] Eichrodt, 2:468.

> God, create a clean heart in me,
> put into me a new and constant spirit,
> do not banish me from your presence,
> do not deprive me of your holy spirit.
>
> Be my saviour again, renew my joy,
> keep my spirit steady and willing;
> and I shall teach transgressors the way to you,
> and to you the sinners will return. (10-13)

Here we see for the last time in the Old Testament the radical character of conversion as a deep sense of sin coupled with the possibility of turning to God and forming a new relationship with him.

Already in Ezekiel we are aware that the concept of conversion has lost something of its greatness:

> But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness which he has done he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity and does the same abominable things that the wicked man does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds which he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, he shall die. (18:21-24)

Man is seen as either wicked or just. Conversion is always negative, the evil man is called upon to change his evil ways. Ezekiel's usage, as Holladay puts it, "is without exception negative ('turn back from evil/good'), never positive ('return to God/good')."[1] Man's conversion is thus an attitude toward sin rather than toward good:

> Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord God; so turn and live. (18:30-32)

Ezekiel continues Jeremiah's teaching that man's turning is actually possible, and that it is a gift of God. Finally, like Jeremiah, he declares that it results in a new heart:

> And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. (11:19-20)

Where Exekiel differs from Jeremiah is in his emphasis on the new heart as one bent on keeping the Law. Ernst Würthwein comments on the effect such an emphasis made on the concept of conversion:

> In general one may sum up the development of the concept of conversion in the exilic and post-exilic periods by saying that the legal thrust of the age left its mark also on the understanding of conversion. This means that

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[1] Holladay, p. 154.

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> the radical and total character of conversion was to a large extent lost.[1]

Würthwein also explains how the Deuteronomic school and Priestly code considered "the essence of conversion above all in turning away from cultic sins." Conversion began to focus exclusively on the Law with its commands, prescriptions, and rites:

> Return to the Lord, your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you this day, with all your heart and with all your soul. (Dt 30:2; cf. 30:10)
>
> Turn from your wicked ways and keep my commandments and my laws in accordance with the entire Law I laid down for your fathers and delivered to them through my servants the prophets. (2 K 17:13)

Thus the Law which was the basis for the reconstruction of the post-exilic Israel became the object in the conversion of the individual. Eichrodt discusses the danger that was entailed in such a "thoroughgoing organization of all piety by the Law":

> The effect of this was to make it difficult for men to turn directly to God, since their whole attention was directed to an impersonal, intermediate tribunal. In such circumstances a breach of faithfulness to God was felt rather as a defection from the Law of Yahweh, and likewise conversion was accomplished by turning back to the Law.[2]

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[1] Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. G. Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley 1963-72 ed., s.v. "μετανοέω," 4:989. Hereafter abbreviated TDNT.

[2] Eichrodt, 2:471.

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Conversion did indeed become a function of keeping the Law. In Nehemiah conversion became a turning not to God but to the Law: "And thou didst warn them in order to turn them back to thy Law." (9:29) In one extreme instance the cultic act of celebrating the Passover became the object of conversion as Hezekiah sent messengers to all the people calling them to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover:

> So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, as the king had commanded, saying, "O people of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. . . . For if you return to the Lord, your brethren and your children will find compassion with their captors, and return to this land. For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him." (2 Chron 20:6, 9)

When such a thing occurs, when cultic prescriptions and concrete legal commands become the sole content of conversion, then one's relationship with God becomes a cause and effect, do ut des, proposition. This is exactly what happened in the history of Judaism, as Eichrodt observes:

> Within Judaism there is no difference in importance between seeking God and the zealous study of the Law. Here the danger is that conversion will lose its living point of reference in the divine Thou, and thus become misunderstood as a means ready to Man's hand for dictating his

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relationship with God.[1]

Eichrodt goes on to recount how the concept of conversion continued to deteriorate until it reached the stage where it was incorporated "into the Jewish theory of retribution":

> This is brought out especially vividly in the speeches of Job's friends, who recommend conversion to the great sufferer as the unfailing method of turning away God's punishment, and of recovering all one's lost good fortune. Conversion thus commends itself to the calculations of self-interest as the surest way to escape punishment and calamity; the pious, and therefore clever, man makes use of this constantly available possibility, and is in this way able to win God over to his side. Here almost all sight of God's converting grace has been lost.[2]

The curve of deterioration touches bottom when self-righteousness precludes any need for conversion. At this point no call from God can be heard, no response given, and no radical new relationship between God and man effected. Again we must turn to Eichrodt for a summary of how such a situation came to be:

> . . . the splitting of the Jewish community into the violently feuding factions of 'pious' and 'godless' was bound to weaken any really profound understanding of what it means to turn to God in penitence. Where neither misfortune nor visitation could shake the self-righteous confidence that one belonged to the pious, conversion was inevitably seen rather as something for the godless, of which the righteous had no more need. Thus in reply to Malachi's call to conversion they chant the astonished question:

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[1] Ibid., p. 472 [2] Ibid.

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> 'How shall we return?' And it is perfectly obvious that the self-righteous attitude of many Psalmists no longer leaves any room for the necessity of their own conversion.[1]

We recognize at once in this self-righteous attitude the response of the Pharisees to Christ's call for repentance. This is the state of conversion at the beginning of the New Testament, a far cry from the conversion which Jeremiah had preached with such vigor. It was up to John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul to reinvigorate the concept of conversion.

In Jeremiah we noted that a four-moment structure of conversion emerged: (1) Israel was seen as having sinned against God by turning away from him; (2) despite its sinfulness God calls Israel, by a free gift of his grace, to a new relationship with him; (3) Israel must respond in a positive turning to him; (4) finally, as a result of this heartfelt turning, Israel enters into a radically new relationship with God, so different it could be called a new covenant with him.

We have seen how this structure was altered in the exilic and post-exilic writings. We can only agree with Würthwein:

> We are thus forced to the conclusion that in view of the weakness of a sense of guilt in the post-exilic community the prophetic concept of conversion, which demanded a great power of religious thought and derived from a total and personal understanding of the relation between God and

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[1] Ibid.

> man, could not maintain its former grandeur and profundity. It had to accommodate itself to the possibilities and necessities of the time and to fall in with its dominant legal trends. If we are to know it in its full greatness and significance, we must always turn to the great prophets from Amos to Jeremiah.[1]

The legalistic thrust of the age had depersonalized conversion, setting the Law between God and man, thus diluting the sense of genuine guilt because sin was no longer a turning from God, but rather from the Law. The structure of conversion which emerged had four moments as in Jeremiah, but their content was decidedly different: (1) the evil man had sinned by disobedience to the concrete commands and prescriptions of the Law; (2) God called him to return to obedience; (3) the evil man must respond in a negative turning away from his evil ways; (4) finally, as a result of this turning, the man could be considered just in his new attitude toward the Law. Any judgments we might make about the development and deterioration of the concept of conversion in the Old Testament must be made in terms of the four-moment structure which emerges at any point along the way.

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[1] *TDNT*, 4:989.

CHAPTER II

CONVERSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND AUGUSTINE

Conversion in the Old Testament contained the two components of the exodus: death to a former life, birth to a new one. The fleshpots of Egypt are left behind for the Promised Land. And the transitus, the passage from the one to the other, is a wandering in the desert where a covenant, a new relationship with God, is established.

Conversion always contains death and rebirth. Violence, real or symbolic, is always present. Abraham must tear up his roots in Ur of the Chaldees, must be willing to sacrifice his son. And through this violence, he bears the kingdom away. The violence apportioned to Jacob is to wrestle with God, to Moses to brave the certain death of looking upon the face of God. Isaiah must undergo a burning coal on his lips, Jeremiah the hatred of the people, Hosea must marry a whore, Job man his dung heap, Daniel enter the lion's den, and finally John the Baptist must wander in desert places and lose his head for preaching the baptism of repentance.

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It is John's preaching that smooths the way for the violence of Jesus Christ's presentation of conversion. Jesus first undergoes the symbolic death and rebirth in the waters of the Jordan, finally a literal death and resurrection.[1] And from first to last he preaches a gospel of repentance and conversion. This gospel is taken up in the apostolic *kerygma* and becomes the basis of much of Luke's and Paul's theology. Finally, the memory of one's own conversion, which for Paul was central to his theology, becomes central as well to autobiographical literature in Augustine's *Confessions*. In this chapter we will trace this progression of repentance and conversion from John the Baptist through Augustine and examine the structure of conversion which emerges throughout.

Gospel

John the Baptist stands at the portal between the Old and New Testaments. He is a Janus-figure, double-

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[1] John S. Dunne suggests that Jesus himself experienced conversions, or more precisely, "turning points," in which "he went over from an ignorance to a knowledge." Dunne says that these "were the points where his life intersected with that of John the Baptist." The first and most important was his baptism at John's hands in which he went from uncertainty to certainty about his relationship with God. No summary can do justice to the plausability of Dunne's argument. I mention it here only as an indication that it has been suggested that Jesus himself underwent conversion. See *A Search for God in Time and Memory* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 212-13.

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faced, looking in both directions. And so he looks back upon the theology of conversion of the Old Testament, upon its upward curve of development from covenant through new covenant and finally to the radical conversion preached by the prophets. He also looks back upon its downward curve as the theology of conversion deteriorated into the theory of retribution in which the self-righteousness of the Pharisees was rooted.

It was into this desert of Pharisaic religion that John was to be born. When the Angel announced his coming to Zacharias, he spelled out John's prophetic role in terms of the conversion which Jeremiah had preached: "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God." (Lk 1:16) And so this precursor of the Christ, looking forward to the conversion of the New Testament, took up his task: "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." (Mk 1:4, cf. Lk 3:3; Acts 13:24, 19:4)

Immediately we find a change in the theology of conversion. John comes "to turn" the children of Israel to the Lord their God; he does this by preaching a "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Here we find two Greek words—*epistrephō* (ἐπιστρέφω) and *metanoia* (μετάνοια)—translating the Hebrew *šûbh* which had expressed the change of relationship between

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God and Israel in the Old Testament. Symmachus, a second-century A.D. translator of the Septuagint, used these two Greek words interchangeably for *šûbh*.[1] Many modern translators of the Old Testament do the same.

There seems, however, to be a difference between the two terms. Paul Aubin maintains that *epistrephō-epistrophē* ("to turn"-"a turning") is the Greek translation of *šûbh*, and that *metanoeō-metanoia* ("to repent"-"repentance") functions as a modality of conversion, as it does in the Old Testament when God repents:

> If that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intended to do to it. (Jer 18:8)
>
> Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil. Who knows whether he will not turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him. (Joel 2:13-14)[2]

Aubin also points out that in the New Testament we have no example of God repenting, possibly because the idea of repentance was evolving in the direction of "penitence." We can see this nuance in Luke when Jesus says: "And if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns (*epistrephō*) to you seven times, and says, 'I repent' (*metanoeō*), you must forgive him." (17:4) If repentance adds anything to the idea of conversion, it is the insistence upon the sincerity and radical change which exists in turning. As Paul says to King Agrippa, he preaches to the Gentiles "urging them to repent (*metanoeō*) and turn (*epistrephō*) to God proving their change of heart (*metanoia*) by their deeds." (Acts 21:20) Peter, in his preaching before the Temple, links turning and repentance and adds their results: "Repent (*metanoeō*) therefore, and turn (*epistrephō*) again, that your sins might be blotted out." (Acts 3:19; cf. 2:38)

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[1] Paul Aubin, *Le probleme de la "conversion"* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1963), p. 75.

[2] Ibid.

Aubin also discerns a second modality of conversion, faith or belief: *pisteuō*-*pistis* (πιστεύω-πίστις). To turn and to believe seem to be two aspects of the same attitude. In Luke Jesus is portrayed as foretelling Peter's denial and repentance with the words: "But I have prayed for you that your faith (*pistis*) may not fail; and when you have turned (*epistrephō*) again, strengthen your brethren." (22:32) Faith and conversion are also linked in Paul: "But your faith (*pistis*) in God has gone forth everywhere . . . how you turned (*epistrephō*) to God from idols, to serve a living and true God." (1 Th 1:8-9) In Acts faith is placed in a cause-effect relationship with conversion: "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number that believed (*pisteuō*) turned (*epistrephō*) to the Lord." (11:21) Finally, in Paul's speech to King

Agrippa, which we will discuss at length later, he says that the Lord has given him instructions to preach to the Gentiles "to open their eyes, that they may turn (*epistrephō*) from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith (*pistis*) in me." (26:18) Here forgiveness of sins becomes the result of conversion and faith.

Johannes Behm differs with Aubin, and concludes that what the Old Testament expressed by *šûbh*, the New expresses by *metanoeō*-*metanoia*.[1] This is not the place to try to solve the philological differences raised by the studies of Aubin and Behm. What is important to us is the fact that both Greek words contain the meaning of conversion in the New Testament, and both refer to a radical change in the relationship between man and God.

To ascertain, however, what John the Baptist and Jesus meant when they called the people to repent is no moot philological problem. Behm states the critical need of understanding this call:

> For as the call μετανοεῖτε which Jesus issued in the steps of the Baptist is construed as an emotional appeal: "Feel sorry," or as a stirring of the whole consciousness: "Change your mind," or as a demand for acts of expiation for wrongs committed: "Do penance,"

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[1] *TDNT*, 4:999.

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> or as a summons to a radical change in the relation of God to man and man to God: "Convert," "be converted," so according to these various interpretations there will be radically different understandings of the message of Jesus. Investigation of the history of the term up to NT days has shown us, however, the only path which may be followed, and exposition of the theological usage of the NT will pursue this to its destination, namely, that μετανοέω and μετάνοια are the forms in which the NT gives new expression to the ancient concept of religious and moral conversion.[1]

Thus John the Baptist does not continue the deteriorating notion of conversion which was to be found in contemporary Jewish theology. Rather, as Behm finds, he returns to the conversion which was found in the classical prophets: "What John advances is the ancient prophetic summons for conversion, for a break with the ungodly and sinful past, for turning to God, because God, active in history, turns to man."[2] John adds to this ancient notion the note of eschatological urgency:

> But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, "Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' because I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down

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[1] Ibid., p. 1000. [2] Ibid.

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> and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out." (Mt 3:7-12)

Remarkable, at first sight, is the fact that Jesus presents himself for this baptism of repentance. Why, if repent means "feel sorry" or "change your mind" or "do penance"? But the scene of Jesus submitting to baptism is not absurd if repent means "enter into a radical new relationship with God." For this is what Jesus does, and the dove descending upon him and the voice of God from heaven confirm this new relationship. Moreover, the "appropriate fruit" which Jesus produces as a result of his new relationship with his Father is the activity of his public life which commences almost immediately.

The first preaching of Jesus' public life, as recorded by Matthew and Mark, is "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mt 4:17; cf. Mk 1:15) From the very start, then, Jesus links repentance and the kingdom. The kingdom becomes what we have called the fourth moment of conversion, the state of living (now and everlastingly) in a radical new relationship with God. What characterizes this new life is faith, as Behm rightly emphasizes:

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> In the preaching of Jesus faith grows out of conversion, not as a second thing which He requires, but as the development of the positive side of μετάνοια, the turning to God. Conversion as Jesus understands it is not just negative. It is more than a break with the old nature in face of the threat of eschatological judgment. It embraces the whole walk of the man who is claimed by the divine lordship. It carries with it the founding of a new personal relation of man to God, i.e., of πίστις. "To convert," "to be converted," embraces all that the dawn of God's kingdom demands of man.[1]

Jesus' relationship with the Father is one of humility, kenosis, an emptying of self. So must be the relationship of the convert; he must become as a little child: "Truly, I say to you, unless you be converted and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Mt 18:3-4) This image of a radical change from a man to a child will be reversed in Paul to the change from childishness to maturity. Both images are finally aimed at presenting a description of the convert's new relationship with God.

This new relationship, as we have mentioned, is the fourth moment of conversion. It is the life of faith, of membership in the kingdom. The moments which precede it parallel those which we saw emerge in our study of the Old Testament. The first is that of the

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[1] Ibid., pp. 1002-3.

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person living the unrepentant life, the tree failing to produce good fruit, the people in the wilderness to whom John comes with the baptism of repentance. The second moment is God's call to repentance, mediated by John and by Jesus. The third, the moment of turning, of repentance, of radical change: the convert's response to the call.

Can we find these four moments structuring any episodes in the gospels? There are two striking pericopes in Luke, the last two, in fact, in his gospel. The first one describes Christ's appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus:

> That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were

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> with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said: but him they did not see." And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.
>
> So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. (24:13-35)

Here the first moment reveals a journey away from Jerusalem—away, as it turns out, from the other disciples and from all hope that Jesus was the Messiah. In this moment the disciples are sad, unable to recognize Jesus, and are addressed by him: "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." The second moment, God's call, comes as Jesus expounds the scriptures to them. As they say later, "Did not our hearts burn within us?" The third moment —response—appears in their invitation to Jesus to stay with them. The fourth closes the pericope as their eyes are opened and they return to Jerusalem renewed, their hearts burning within them, to tell how they had recognized the risen Lord in the breaking of the bread.

This same conversion structure dominates the next pericope in which Jesus appears to the apostles in Jerusalem:

> As they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them. But they were startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have." And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.
>
> Then he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high."
>
> Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them. And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God. (24:36-53)

Here the first moment is the state of the apostles when the Lord appears among them. He causes fright and alarm among those assembled; he even remarks that they are troubled and questioning. In the second moment, Jesus moves to dispel their fear by letting them touch him and then by taking some food to eat. Still they disbelieve for joy. Jesus has invited them to conversion just as he had called sinners throughout his public life, but like the disciples at Emmaus they are unable to respond until he "opens their minds to understand the scriptures." This linking of intellectual and religious conversion becomes an important element of Christianity, especially in accounts of religious conversion. Once the apostles have undergone this intense conversion experience—the third moment—Jesus gives them a mandate to preach to all nations "repentance and the forgiveness of sins." This mandate and their joyful return to Jerusalem is the content of the fourth moment. It is more than coincidence that Jerusalem—a new Jerusalem—becomes a symbol of the kingdom and of the state in which the fourth moment is lived par excellence.

Apostolic "Kerygma"

Matthew's and Luke's gospels, and Mark's supposed ending as well, conclude with Christ sending his disciples to preach to all nations, to the whole world.

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But their first audience was the Jews, the same group to which Jesus had confined his own preaching. What they were to preach, the kerygma, we have already seen spelt out in Luke: repentance and forgiveness of sins. The movement from the Old to the New Testament was a quantum leap for the Jews, a leap which was itself a conversion in which they could participate or not. As the struggles of the early Church prove, there was no way to avoid the radical choice for or against Christianity. Even to attempt neutrality was to turn away from the good news which Jesus came to spread.

The four evangelists, in their versions of the good news, were quite aware of the radical decision their writings demanded. In order to explain the obduracy of the Jews who refused to repent and believe, each of them quoted from Isaiah 6:9-10, in which the Lord says to Isaiah:

> Go, and say to this people,
> "Hear and hear again, but do not understand;
> see and see again, but do not perceive."
> Make the heart of this people gross,
> its ears dull;
> shut its eyes,
> so that it will not see with its eyes,
> hear with its ears,
> understand with its heart,
> and turn and be healed.[1]

The conclusion is that just as God works conversion in some (by his efficacious call, as we have already noted), so in others he allows their hearts to be hardened. If the Jews refuse to repent and believe, it is God's work; the apostles will take the kerygma to the Gentiles.

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[1] Cf. Mt 13:15; Mk 4:12; Lk 8:10; Jn 12:40; and Acts 28:27.

This decision was the most important the early Church had to make. The evangelists ground this decision to preach repentance to all nations in the words of Jesus and in the theology of conversion as found in the Old Testament. We have already noted that the synoptic gospels portray Jesus giving the mandate to preach the good news to all the nations. In Matthew and Mark, moreover, Jesus' last words on the cross—"My God, my God, why have you deserted me?"—come directly from Psalm 22, which contains one of the rare references to the conversion of the Gentiles in the Old Testament:

> All the ends of the earth shall remember
>   and turn to the Lord;
> and all the families of the nations
>   shall worship before him.
> For dominion belongs to the Lord,
>   and he rules over the nations. (27-28)

Aubin makes the point that there is no distinction in the New Testament between the conversion of Jews and of Gentiles.[1] Peter can address the Jews before the temple and say, "Now you must repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out." (Acts 3:19) Later, Luke tells how the Jews criticize Peter for preaching to the uncircumsized; Peter answers them and the "account satisfied them, and they gave glory to God. 'God' they said 'can evidently grant even the pagans the repentance that leads to life.'" (11:18) In his account of the foundation of the church at Antioch, Luke again shows how the same repentance was preached to Jew and Gentile alike without any distinction:

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[1] Aubin, pp. 71-72.

> Those who had escaped during the persecution that happened because of Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, but they usually proclaimed the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, who came from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch where they started preaching to the Greeks, proclaiming the Good News of the Lord Jesus to them as well. The Lord helped them, and a great number believed and were converted to the Lord. (11:18-21)

Paul makes no distinction either between the conversion of Jews and Gentiles in his speech to King Agrippa: "I started preaching, first to the people of Damascus, then to those of Jerusalem and all the countryside of Judea, and also to the pagans, urging them to repent and to turn to God, proving their change of heart by their deeds." (26:20)

But if both Jews and Gentiles were called to the same conversion, both were also warned against falling away from their new relationship with God; of apostasy, that is, of what William James calls "counter-conversion." James B. Pratt defines this phenomenon as "the sudden and emotional turning away from Christianity and religion"

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which follows "much the same course as the conventional conversion experience."[1] Paul, in his letter to the Galatians is content to handle this problem with a question: "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more?" (4:8) The author of Peter's second letter takes a much harder line:

> For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness then after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, The dog turns back to his own vomit, and the sow is washed only to wallow in the mire. (2:21-22)

We must turn to Hebrews, however, for the severest, and the most extensive, treatment of counter-conversion. John Bunyan was driven to the brink of despair by an inner voice which kept repeating Hebrews' admonition that "no one be immoral or irreligious like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears." (12:16-17)

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[1] The Religious Consciousness: A Psychological Study (New York: Macmillan, 1920), p. 126.

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As Bunyan realized, this is a reiteration of the truth that conversion depends upon God's call, and that man can do nothing to effect his own conversion. But Hebrews maintains further that God will not effect a second conversion after apostasy: "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt." (6:4-6) Behm provides the best summary and explanation on this subject of counter-conversion:

> The man who has once experienced this decisive change in his life and become a καινὴ κτίσις [new creation], entering the circle of the revelation of eschatological salvation, has been set thereby in an eternal movement. If he arrests this movement, he turns from the living God (3:12), sins with full awareness and will (10:26), and is thus exposed to eschatological judgment (6:8; 10:27ff). In this case no human possibility exists of bringing him afresh to conversion. In the form of a sharp pastoral warning on a specific occasion Hebrews expresses the conviction that μετάνοια is a totality and that its surrender is consequently a total surrender.[1]

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[1] TDNT, 4:1006.

In this overview of the theology of conversion and counter-conversion in the apostolic kerygma we have mentioned Paul only in passing. But to speak of conversion and the preaching of the early Church is to speak of Paul's own conversion on the road to Damascus and his theologizing on that experience in his letters. In them we will find his theology of conversion as well as the four-moment structure we have seen emerge in the Old Testament and the gospels.

Paul

One cannot fully understand Paul's letters without understanding their author's experience of conversion. Joachim Jeremias, in a paper entitled "The Key to Pauline Theology," states that "his theology is a theology rooted in a sudden conversion."[1] What was Paul's experience of conversion in his own life and how did he develop his theology as a response to and an explanation of this personal event?

The most complete accounts of his conversion do not come from his letters, but are found in Acts. In the latter, Paul's experience on the road to Damascus becomes the exemplum of the conversion experience and its aftermath. As he writes his letters this experience is always in the background although he mentions it explicitly only a few times. The only complete account is in Galatians:

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[1] The Expository Times 76 (October 1964): 28.

> For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus. (1:13-17)

Paul emphasizes the call of God's grace. Without it there can be no conversion. In Philippians he refers to the violence of his own call: "I am still running, trying to capture the prize for which Christ Jesus captured me." (3:13) The radical nature of his conversion comes up again in First Corinthians: "And last of all he appeared to me too; it was as though I was born when no one expected it." (15:8)

But although the violence of the Damascus experience seems to haunt Paul and drive him on to preach repentance and conversion to Christ, yet his theological treatment of conversion rarely makes reference to that once-and-for-all experience. Rather in the letters he is intent on the conversion which has taken place in the lives of the new Christians. He must explain exactly

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what has happened to them, give them further insights into the implications of their turning to Christ, and help them grow in Christ.

Just as Paul's experience of conversion narrated in Acts will contain four distinguishable moments, so does the development of his theology in the letters. The first moment is that of the "old man," the man before conversion. In Romans Paul says that the Gentiles were capable of coming to a natural knowledge of God, yet they did not honor him or give him thanks:

> They became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. (1:21-22)

He follows with a list of sins the Gentiles fell into. (1:24-32) In Galatians he says that the Gentiles were slaves to "weak and beggarly elemental spirits." (4:1-9)

If Paul seems to talk harshly about the state of the Gentiles before their conversion, he is certainly as harsh with the Jews. He devotes over a chapter in Romans (2:1-3:8) to their sinfulness. For although they had the Law, they did not obey it. Their claims of circumcision and the oracles of God had no value because of this disobedience. He quotes the words of Isaiah against them: "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." (2:24)

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Paul's final judgment is that "all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin." (3:9) He follows this statement with a collage of quotations from the Psalms and Isaiah on the sinful state of man before conversion:

> There is not a good man left, no, not one;
> there is not one who understands,
> not one who looks for God.
> All have turned aside, tainted all alike;
> there is not one good man left, not a single one.
> Their throats are yawning graves;
> their tongues are full of deceit.
> Vipers' venom is on their lips,
> bitter curses fill their mouths.
> Their feet are swift when blood is to be shed,
> wherever they go there is havoc and ruin.
> They know nothing of the way of peace,
> there is no fear of God before their eyes. (3:10-18)

This is how Paul views the state of man without Christ. Throughout the letters he uses the imagery of flesh, slavery, and death to describe man in what we have been calling the first moment of conversion.

The second moment corresponds to the sudden vision that Paul had of Christ on the way to Damascus. In Romans Paul asks the question, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" His answer embodies what we distinguish as this second moment of conversion: "Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (7:24-25) Again and again in his letters Paul will use this formula, "through Christ" (διὰ Χριστοῦ). It sums up the fact and the necessity of Christ's intervention in a man's life before he can be converted

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"into Christ" (εἰς Χριστόν) and finally live a new life "with Christ" (σὺν Χριστῷ) and "in Christ" (ἐν Χριστῷ).

Paul understands that this moment of Christ's intervention in a man's sinful life depends upon a knowledge of Christ. A man must hear the good news: "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ." (Rom 10:17) This is why Paul labors so hard, that all men may come to hear of Christ and thus be converted to him. However, a man may hear the good news and still reject its message. God's grace must be present: "It is God who in his good will is at work in your hearts, inspiring each decision and action." (Ph 2:13)

This is the crucial content of the second moment: the intervention of God's grace which the individual man may either accept or reject in the third moment.[1] This grace is a gift of God just as Paul's Damascus experience had been: "It is by his favor that you have been saved through faith; and this does not come from you; it is a gift of God." (Eph 2:8) The whole initiative is

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[1] I am aware of the blood and ink shed over the question of man's freedom to accept or reject grace. The controversy makes little difference to the *structure* of conversion, since any response of man to God's grace is contained in the third moment of conversion. Whether some additional grace is considered necessary has no effect on my argument.

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God's. If he withholds his grace, then man remains blinded to the truth as the Jews were (2 Cor 3:15-18); if he gives his grace, man becomes open to reconciliation: "It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation." (2 Cor 5:18)

If a man accepts God's grace and responds to it he is said to have faith. This turning to God in faith is the third moment of conversion, the moment of turning, repentance, change of heart, rebirth and freedom, the moment of "into Christ." It is to this crucial point in a man's life that all God's grace is ordered: "Do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (Rom 2:4)

In the second moment a man was called by God's grace, but he was left free to accept or reject the call. At the beginning of Romans, Paul defines his mission in terms of this movement from call to submission in faith: "Through whom [Christ] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ." (1:5-6)

The dynamism of the second moment was "through Christ"; here it is "into Christ." It was Christ's

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God's. If he withholds his grace, then man remains blinded to the truth as the Jews were (2 Cor 3:15-18); if he gives his grace, man becomes open to reconciliation: "It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation." (2 Cor 5:18)

If a man accepts God's grace and responds to it he is said to have faith. This turning to God in faith is the third moment of conversion, the moment of turning, repentance, change of heart, rebirth and freedom, the moment of "into Christ." It is to this crucial point in a man's life that all God's grace is ordered: "Do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (Rom 2:4)

In the second moment a man was called by God's grace, but he was left free to accept or reject the call. At the beginning of Romans, Paul defines his mission in terms of this movement from call to submission in faith: "Through whom [Christ] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ." (1:5-6)

The dynamism of the second moment was "through Christ"; here it is "into Christ." It was Christ's

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initiative in the second, here it is man's response. He must act and the terminus of the action is life in Christ —he is called to have faith into Christ and to be baptized into Christ. Man's need for action in this moment is also described as changing his heart and turning. There is nothing passive about this moment. It is up to man to act; any lack of movement into Christ can only be interpreted as remaining in the bondage of sin.

Once a man has turned to Christ in faith, Paul considers him to be justified. Baptism is the seal set upon a man's conversion as well as a sign of his justification: "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor 6:11) Baptism seems to be the nexus between the third moment of man's turning in faith and the fourth of man's new life in Christ: "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:26-28)

Baptism becomes a sign of man's turning away from the idols of his former life and his turning to Christ. Once he has turned to Christ and into Christ, he enters into the fourth moment of "in Christ and with

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Christ." In terms of Paul's baptism imagery, the movement is clear: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Rom 6:3-4)

This newness of life is the content of the fourth moment: "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." (2 Cor 5:17) Paul speaks continually about new men and minds and lives. In Christ there is a new creation that cannot be compared with the old creation of death and slavery. Man has died to sin with Christ and now he rises to a new life in him: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Rom 6:11)

Paul uses two prepositional phrases to characterize this fourth and final moment of conversion. The first is "in Christ" which he uses 165 times in his letters. Simply stated, it describes the Christian who has turned to Christ and has submitted himself to Christ's continuous intervention and dominion in his new life. The union between Christ and Christian is now so close that Paul can speak of "Christ in me" (Gal 12:20; 2 Cor 13:5; Rom 8:10; Col 1:27; Eph 3:17).

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But even in this new life there is room for development and growth in Christ. Paul uses the imagery of growing to maturity and attaining the fullness of Christ. He envisions his mission as helping the new Christians to grow:

> Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me. (Col 1:28-29)

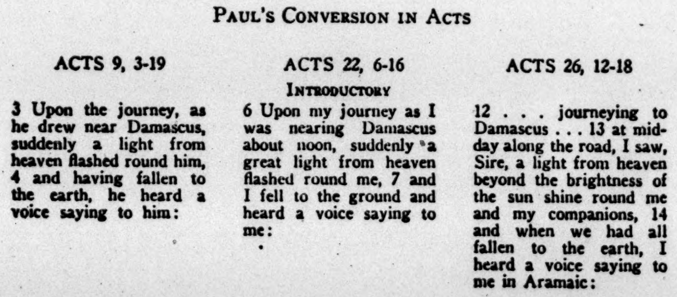
This necessity of maturing in Christ leads into the doctrine (Pauline, whether or not one judges that Paul wrote Ephesians) of the Mystical Body:

> Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself with love. (4:15-16)

The second prepositional phrase that Paul uses to characterize this moment is "with Christ." Here we have the notion of eschatological glory: "Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence." (2 Cor 4:14) Those who have died in Christ and lived the new life in him have the promise of resurrection with him. (1 Thes 4:14; Rom 6:8, 8:32)

Thus the fourth moment is open-ended; it is not only coming to maturity in Christ, but also to eternal life with him. Conversion becomes an ongoing process of continual incorporation through Christ and into him and with him and in him. The experience is uniquely Christian; the theology uniquely Pauline: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal 2:20)

In Acts we find a non-Pauline account of Paul's conversion. In fact, we find three accounts of the Damascus experience. There are many questions which can be asked of these three versions, most of which have been answered by David Stanley.[1] We will limit ourselves to one he did not handle: What is the structure of conversion that emerges from the three accounts? First a synopsis:



PAUL'S CONVERSION IN ACTS

ACTS 9, 3-19	ACTS 22, 6-16	ACTS 26, 12-18
	INTRODUCTORY	
3 Upon the journey, as he drew near Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed round him, 4 and having fallen to the earth, he heard a voice saying to him:	6 Upon my journey as I was nearing Damascus about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven flashed round me, 7 and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me:	12 . . . journeying to Damascus . . . 13 at midday along the road, I saw, Sire, a light from heaven beyond the brightness of the sun shine round me and my companions, 14 and when we had all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic:

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[1] "Paul's Conversion in Acts: Why the Three Accounts?" Catholic Biblical Quarterly 15 (July 1953): 315-38.

The Encounter

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? 5 And he said: Who are you, Lord? He: I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting.	8 Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? And I replied: Who are you, Lord? And He said to me: I am Jesus the Nazarene, Whom you are persecuting. . . 10 I said: What shall I do, Lord? Then the Lord said to me:	Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goad. — And I said: 15 Who are you, Lord? The Lord said: I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting.
6 But get up, and enter the city, and you will be told what you have to do.	Get up, and go to Damascus, and there you will be told all that is determined for you to do.	16 But get up and stand on your feet: for I have appeared to you in order to constitute you a servant and a witness of the fact you have seen Me, and of what I shall, in future appearances, reveal to you, choosing you from the people and from the Gentiles to whom I shall send you, 18 to open their eyes, to turn (them) from darkness to light, and from Satan to God, so that they may receive remission of their sins and an inheritance among those consecrated by faith in Me.

The Effect on Paul and on Companions

7 Now his companions stood speechless, for they heard the voice, but saw no one.	9 (Now my companions saw the light, but they did not hear the voice speaking to me.)	
8 Saul was raised up from the earth, but though his eyes were open, he saw nothing. And leading him, they brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days sightless; and he did not eat or drink.	11 Since I could not see because of the glory of that light, being led by my companions, I came to Damascus.	

ROLE OF ANANIAS

10 There was a disciple in Damascus by the name of Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision: Ananias!—He replied: Here, Lord! 11 The Lord said to him: Arise, go into the lane called Straight; and seek in the house of Judas, Saul called the Tarsian. For lo, he is praying, and 12 he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands upon him that he may recover his sight.—13 But Ananias replied: Lord, I have heard from many about this man and of the harm he did to Your saints in Jerusalem; 14 and here he has power from the high priests to shackle all who call upon Your Name.—15 And the Lord said to him: Go!—a vessel of election is the man to Me: to carry My Name to the Gentiles and kings and to the sons of Israel. 16 For I shall show him what he must suffer for My Name's sake.	12 Now Ananias, a man whose devotion to the Law is attested by the resident Jews,
17—And Ananias went to the house, and laying his hands upon him said: Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me,—Jesus, Who appeared to you on the road you were travelling,—that you may recover your sight and be filled with a Holy Spirit.—	13 came to me: and standing by me, said to me: Saul, brother, recover your sight
18 And straightway a kind of scales fell from his eyes, and he recovered his sight:	And I at once recovered my sight. 14 Then he said: The God of our fathers has selected you to learn His Will: to see the Just One and hear from His lips 15 that you are to be a witness for Him before all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now, why delay? get up and be baptised, and be washed free of your sins by invoking His Name.
and rising up, he was baptised:	
19 and when he had eaten, he regained his strength.	

Just as in the Emmaus episode, we find Luke presenting a conversion narrative which opens with a journey followed by an appearance of the Lord. This encounter is in the form of a call to conversion, a living initiative which on the one hand is irresistible and on the other leaves room for a free response. Immediately evident in the synopsis above is that the only full verbal agreement among the three accounts is in the dialogue between Paul and Jesus. Important in this is the identity this dialogue makes between Jesus and the Church which Paul is persecuting. Thus when Paul responds, it is the Church to which he turns.

In the first two accounts there is a hiatus between Paul's response and the new life of conversion. When Ananias mediates this new life it contains the return of his sight, the gift of the Holy Spirit, new understanding, and finally baptism and the forgiveness of sins.

In the third account, the new life is not deferred to the mediation of Ananias. Rather, the Lord announces that Paul will be a servant and a witness of the Lord. It is within the conversion experience that Paul is given his mandate to preach to the Gentiles. The content of his preaching will be the same as that given to the apostles at the end of Luke: "To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from Satan to God, so that they may receive remission of their sins and an inheritance among those consecrated by faith in me."

This third account is narrated by Paul to King Agrippa. He continues by elaborating on the aftermath of his conversion:

> Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of their repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles. (26:19-23)

Here again we see that the experience of conversion contains an openness to the meaning of the prophets and Moses. Paul preaches conversion and repentance. He urges the Gentiles to "perform deeds worthy of their repentance." This becomes the content of the fourth moment of his conversion, the work he must do in order to be obedient to the heavenly vision. This obedience to the consequences of conversion cannot be over-emphasized. Once one has turned from darkness to the light, he must live a new life in the light and worthy of it.

Thus we can summarize Luke's three accounts of Paul's conversion in terms of four moments. The first is the moment before conversion when he goes about persecuting the Christians and therefore Christ. This is the moment of darkness and the dominion of Satan from which Paul is later sent to deliver both Jew and Gentile.

The second moment is that of Christ's intervention. He comes into Paul's life of darkness quite directly. Into most lives this intervention of grace will be mediated by the preaching of the good news by Paul and the other apostles. The important element in this moment, as Jesus tells Paul in the vision, is that conversion comes "through faith in me."

The third moment is that of conversion proper, the turning "from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to God." In Paul's experience on the road to Damascus this moment was confirmed by his reception of baptism and regaining of sight.

The fourth moment is the new life that this change of heart implies, "proving their change of heart by their deeds." In a more eschatological sense it is "a share in the inheritance of the sanctified." All of Paul's missionary activity took place in this fourth moment of conversion. It was from this vantage that he developed a theology of conversion in his letters.

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Augustine

Paul's experience on the road to Damascus was central to his later theological writings in the letters. What is too often overlooked is that these letters were not considered as merely theological writings to the early Christians. Rather they were a literary heritage, the elemental Christian literature along with the gospels. We tend to overlook this, I think, because for us these writings are so much more than literature; they are revelation. But, in actual fact, during the first two centuries of the Church the New Testament literature as we know it existed amid a welter of patristic and apocryphal writings.

What was needed was a statement of the Church defining which of these early writings belonged to the canon of holy scriptures. In North Africa the earliest decisions concerning canonicity were made at the councils of Hippo (393), III Carthage (397), and another Carthage council (419). James Turro points out that "each of these approved a list of Old Testament and New Testament books coinciding with what later would be defined by Trent."[1] What is significant, I almost wrote coincidental, is that Augustine was present at all three of these North African councils: in the first as a priest expounding "On the Faith and the Creed," at the next two as an organizing bishop. Anyone familiar with Augustine can readily imagine him in the thick of the discussions on revelation and inspiration that led up to these definitions. Can we call it coincidence that this comparatively new convert to orthodoxy wrote his Confessions about the time of the second of these councils?

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[1] "Canonicity," in JBC, 67:9.

What I am suggesting is that once the canon of scripture was fixed Christian writers were freed to explore the other side of the continental divide. The revealed books had been distinguished once and for all from their supporting works and commentaries. Augustine, and all who would follow after him, now had a clear idea of what was settled territory and which way lay the new frontiers. Augustine could look back and say "I would not believe the Gospel did not the authority of the Catholic Church move me to this,"[1] and venture forth to explore a new continent in his Confessions.

From our vantage of sixteen centuries, there is no doubt that the Confessions was a radically new conception. Roy Pascal calls it "the first great autobiography."[2] He adds that though "Augustine's primary purpose was no doubt to write a testimony to God, and his book has remained a manual of devotion" yet he also was producing literature and so "in this first example autobiography appears as art."[1] Peter Brown maintains that we tend to consider Augustine our contemporary and thus "we forget that a Late Roman man who first opened his copy of the Confessions, would have found them a startling book: traditional forms of literary expression, that he had taken for granted, would flow into it only to be transformed beyond recognition."[2]

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[1] Contra epistolam Manichaei, 5. 6.

[2] Design and Truth in Autobiography (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 11.

In this study we are considering both the theology of conversion and its literary patterning. Thus far our focus has been primarily on the first: the theology of conversion which emerges from a scrutiny of the Old and New Testaments. The rest of our study will be devoted primarily to the literary patterning of conversion in Dante, Bunyan, and Joyce. The bridge between these two headlands is Augustine, specifically his Confessions. Perhaps it is not the first work beyond the scriptures which bridges theology and literature (though it is certainly the first which springs to mind), but

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[1] Ibid., p. 23.

[2] Augustine of Hippo: A Biography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 165.

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it is certainly the first which patterns the conversion experience in an artistic form.

The artistic form of the Confessions contains not only the theme of conversion, but also its structure. Just as Paul's structure of conversion was rooted in his experience on the road to Damascus, Augustine's is rooted in his central conversion experience in the garden at Milan. Following the model of Paul, we would expect the structure of that peak experience to affect all of his subsequent memories and reflections upon God's work in his life. Augustine's account of his religious conversion, however, is more complicated than Paul's because it comes as the climax of several intellectual conversions. We will call his religious conversion in the garden at Milan his central conversion and treat that first, then backtrack to consider the earlier instances of intellectual or philosophical conversion.

The narration of Augustine's central conversion experience begins in the eighth book when he enters the garden. Recounting the "tumult within my breast," he describes his struggle in a tumult of imagery: "raging combat," "fearful wound," "quaked in spirit," "angered by a most turbulent anger," "shifting tides of indecision." (8:8)[1] The battle is within, a matter of "to

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[1] Translations of the Confessions are by John K. Ryan (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1960) or by F. J. Sheed (London: Sheed and Ward, 1944).

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turn and to toss, now here, now there, a struggling, half-maimed will, with one part rising upwards and another falling down." William James says of this phenomenon that "Augustine's psychological genius has given an account of the trouble of having a divided self which has never been surpassed."[1]

Augustine breaks off his narrative for a polemic against the Manichean doctrine of two wills (8:9-10), but returns to the narrative of the struggle within his divided self. This sort of struggle, James would later conclude, usually precedes the experience of conversion. Here Augustine tells how he was confronted by two visions: the first one, "my lovers of old, trifles of trifles and vanities of vanities, held me back"; the second, "there appeared to me the chaste dignity of continence, serene and joyous, but in no wanton fashion, virtuously alluring, so that I would come to her and hesitate no longer." Here, in narrative terms at least, the struggle of the divided self is objectified. Augustine seems to emphasize the metaphoric nature of these visions when he concludes that "this debate within my heart was solely of myself against myself." (8:11)

Augustine then narrates the conversion itself. He is at the nadir of emotion: "But when deep reflection had dredged out of the secret recesses of my soul all my misery and heaped it up in full view of my heart, there arose a mighty storm, bringing with it a mighty downpour of tears." He leaves Alypius, who has been with him all this time, and goes off by himself. He begins to repeat the prayer, "How long, O Lord, how long?" Then "with most bitter contrition I wept within my heart." At this moment he hears a chant, "Tolle, lege," from the neighboring house:

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[1] James, p. 147.

> Instantly, with altered countenance, I began to think most intently whether children make use of any such chant in some kind of game, but I could not recall hearing it anywhere. I checked the flow of my tears and got up, for I interpreted this solely as a command given to me by God to open the book and read the first chapter I should come upon. For I had heard how Anthony had been admonished by a reading from the Gospel at which he chanced to be present, as if the words read were addressed to him: "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me," and that by such a portent he was immediately converted to you. (8:12)

Augustine interprets the "take and read" as a call from God. Remembering Anthony, whose story he had heard a short time earlier, he responds as immediately as he had:

> So I hurried back to the spot where Alypius was sitting, for I had put there the volume of the apostle when I got up and left him. I snatched it up, opened it, and read in silence the chapter on which my eyes first fell: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in strife and envying; but put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision

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> for the flesh in its concupiscences." No further wished I to read, nor was there need to do so. Instantly, in truth, at the end of this sentence, as if before a peaceful light streaming into my heart, all the dark shadows of doubt fled away. (8:12)

Augustine thus responds to the call, opens the book and reads from Romans. The results of the reading are instant peace and the shedding of all doubts. He tells Alypius what has happened. His companion takes the book and reads the next verse: "Now him that is weak in the faith take unto you." Then Augustine tells how Alypius, following his own and Anthony's conversion experience, "joined me without any painful hesitation." (8:12)

Thus we see in the course of this brief narrative a structure of conversion repeated three times in the cases of Augustine, Anthony, and Alypius. What is this structure? First, the struggle within the divided self; second, the call of God to read from the scriptures; third, the response of reading; and fourth, the aftermath of peace, conviction, and the conversion of companions—exactly the same four-moment structure we found above in Paul. A look at the other accounts of conversion in the Confessions may reveal more about this structure and lead us to some conclusions about its invariability.

Augustine closes the garden narrative with a recapitulation of its argument: "For you had converted

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me to yourself, so that I would seek neither wife nor ambition in this world, for I would stand on that rule of faith where, so many years before, you had showed me to her [my mother]." (8:12) This is a recapitulation not only of his own conversion, but of the three conversion stories which had preceded and built up to it.

These three stories form the framework of the first six chapters of book 8. The book opens with a summary of what he intends to argue: "You have broken my bonds. I will sacrifice to you the sacrifice of praise. I will narrate how you broke them asunder." (8:1) He then gives an account of his way up to this point in his story. In a passage very like the beginning of Pilgrim's Progress he says: "I was displeased with the course I followed in the world, and with my desires no longer aflame with hope of honor and wealth, as they had been, to bear so grievous a bondage was a very great burden to me." Again we have the imagery of the divided self and the wanderer: "I was tossed all about," "still I hesitated," and "the winding ways of my errors." (8:1)

Augustine goes to Simplicianus who tells him the first story of conversion to be narrated, about Victorinus, a famous Roman professor of rhetoric. Like Augustine's, his was first an intellectual conversion, one in which he could claim "I am already a Christian," but still be incapable of moving his will to a public confession. How was he finally moved? Just as in Augustine's case and according to the structure of conversion he experienced, "through reading and longing." There is a repetition of Augustine's sudden response: "Suddenly and unexpectedly, he said to Simplicianus, who has himself described it, 'Let us go to the church. I wish to become a Christian.'" (8:2)

The second story of conversion is that of Anthony told by Ponticianus. (8:6) The narration of it forms an inclusion with Augustine's later conversion, since it is then that Augustine remembers elements of Anthony's conversion which at this point are only hinted at. Augustine does not record the actual narrative of Anthony's conversion, but rather says that Ponticianus took up the book of Paul's letters which reminded him of the story of Anthony, which he then tells to Augustine and his companions. The book of Paul's letters and the fact that Anthony was converted to monasticism adds to the foreshadowing effect of this first element of the inclusion.

The third story is also told by Ponticianus; it concerns two men at Trier. (8:6) The prelude or first moment presents the two going "for a walk in the gardens along the walls." Twice their walking is called "wandering," a term often used before of this moment. The second moment, as we have been led to expect by previous structures of conversion, involves finding a book. This time it is not the scriptures, but a life of Anthony. The response of one of the men is to take it up and read: "Then the reader, suddenly filled with holy love and by sober shame made angry with himself, turned his eyes upon his friend." Again the response is sudden and involves a companion. Within the moment of response, Augustine includes the modality of metanoia:

> In anguish during this birth of a new life, he turned his eyes again upon those pages. He read on and was changed within himself, where your eye could see. His mind was stripped of this world, as soon became apparent. For as he read, and turned about on the waves of his heart, he raged at himself for a while, but then discerned better things and determined upon them.

This is one of Augustine's most intense descriptions of the psychology of conversion. It emphasizes the newness that follows the third moment of turning. The fourth moment, as we have seen before, involves the spreading of the conversion experience to others:

> Already belonging to you, he said to his friend, "I have now broken away from our former hopes, and I have determined to serve God, and from this very hour and in this very place I make my start. If it is too much for you to imitate me, do not oppose me." The other answered that he would join him as a comrade for so great a reward and in so great a service.

Thus in this third story of conversion we find once more the structure of Augustine's own conversion.

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There is wandering, the finding of a book, the reading of it, and the sudden newness of life which leads to the further conversion of a companion. But if this structure applies to these examples of spiritual conversion in book 8, can we also find them in the intellectual conversions which Augustine undergoes in books 3 to 7 of the Confessions?

The first of four such intellectual conversions appears in the third book: Augustine turns from being a student of rhetoric and becomes a Ciceronian philosopher and Manichean. First of all, we find the moment of wandering in Augustine's apostrophe: "O you my most mighty mercy, my God, my refuge from those terrible dangers amid which I wandered, too proud of neck, so that I might depart far from you, loving my own ways and not yours, loving a fugitive's freedom!" (3:3)

The second moment is mediated by reading a book; the third involves beginning a return to the Lord:

> Among such associates of my callow youth I studied the treatises on eloquence, in which I desired to shine, for a damnable and inflated purpose, directed towards empty human joys. In the ordinary course of study I came upon a book by a certain Cicero, whose tongue almost all men admire but not his heart. This work contains his exhortation to philosophy and is called Hortensius. This book changed my affections. It turned my prayers to you, Lord, and caused me to have different purposes and desires. All my vain hopes forthwith became worthless to me, and with incredible ardor of heart I desired undying wisdom. I began to rise up, so that I might return to you. (3:4)

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In the fourth moment, the new life of philosophy, Augustine tells how he turned to a study of the scriptures but found them "unworthy of comparison with the nobility of Cicero's writings." (3:5) And so within this fourth moment of conversion to philosophy, unable to accept the humble style of the scriptures, Augustine "fell in with certain men," Manichees, with whom he remained for the next ten years. (3:6)

His second intellectual conversion came upon listening to Ambrose preach in Milan. Between his conversion to Manicheism and this meeting with Ambrose, Augustine describes his life as a dialectic between sinful wandering on the one hand and pleading with God to convert him on the other. Ambrose is portrayed as the dialectical opposite of the Manichean bishop, Faustus: "The one man went wandering about among his Manichean fallacies, whereas the other taught salvation in a most salutary way." (5:13)

Here the call to conversion does not come through reading the scriptures, but through listening to Ambrose preach them:

> Although I was not anxious to learn what he said, but merely to hear how he said it—for such bootless concern remained with me, although I had no hope that any way lay open for a man to come to you—yet at the same time with the words, which I loved, there also entered into my mind the things themselves, to which I was indifferent. Nor was I able to separate them from one another, and when I opened up my heart to receive the

> eloquence with which he spoke, there likewise entered, although only by degrees, the truths that he spoke. At first it began to appear that what he said could be defended. I now judged that the Catholic faith, for which I had thought nothing could be said against the Manichean objectors, could be maintained without being ashamed of it. This was especially the case after I had heard various passages in the Old Testament explained most frequently by way of allegory, by which same passages I was killed when I had taken them literally. Hence when many passages in those books were explained spiritually, I now blamed my own despair, in which I had believed that the law and the prophets could in no way be upheld against those who hated them and scoffed at them. (5:14)

What is especially interesting about this conversion is that it involves a turning to a new hermeneutic, one which changes not only Augustine's subsequent method of reading scripture, but his method of composition as well. Without this conversion, Augustine would never have been able to write the Confessions, a most unliteral book.

There were two consequences of this conversion, one negative—"I resolved that the Manicheans must be abandoned"—the other positive—"I determined to continue as a catechumen in the Catholic Church, commended to me by my parents, until something certain would enlighten me, by which I might direct my course." (5:14)

After this, Augustine's narrative of his life continues as a dialectic between wandering and pleading to be converted. His next intellectual turning is to

Neo-Platonism. The structure is the same, only the books he reads are different: "By means of a certain man puffed up with most unnatural pride, you procured for me certain books of the Platonists that had been translated out of Greek into Latin." (7:9) As a result of these books he enters into the Neo-Platonic structure of conversion which can best be summarized as a two-step turning. Augustine describes the first step:

> Being thus admonished to return to myself, under your leadership I entered into my inmost being. This I could do, for you became my helper. I entered there, and by my soul's eye, such as it was, I saw above that same eye of my soul, above my mind, an unchangeable light. (7:10)

There follows a second step in which ~~one~~ transcends his inner soul and is taken up into the transcendent intellect. Augustine describes this movement:

> When first I knew you, you took me up, so that I might see that there was something to see, but that I was not yet one able to see it. You beat back my feeble sight, sending down your beams most powerfully upon me, and I trembled with love and awe. I found myself to be far from you in a region of unlikeness, as though I heard your voice from on high: "I am the food of grown men." (7:10)

Here we can recognize the difference between the Christian and the Neo-Platonic structures of conversion. In the Christian, there is a single turning which is initiated by the call or grace of God. This call might be mediated by his word written in the scriptures or preached by an Ambrose, but it is the efficient cause

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that man responds to. The Neo-Platonic structure, however, contains two conversions. The first—a turning away from the senses and into oneself—is an intellectual conversion which man can effect on his own. The second—man transcending himself—is either to be effected by man himself or, as the Christian Neo-Platonists would have it, by God moving man to the higher state.

What becomes clear at this point is that the four-moment structure of conversion which we have identified in Paul and in the eighth book of the _Confessions_ corresponds to the second, or spiritual, step of the Neo-Platonic conversion. What we have been calling Augustine's intellectual conversion is the first step, or the movement of turning into one's inner self. Augustine's dichotomy between intellect and will corresponds to these two steps. Involved too is his concept of God's grace as an interior assistance strengthening the will. Thus, the conversion in the garden at Milan follows both the conversion structures of Paul (book 8) and also that of the Neo-Platonists (books 3-7). Augustine's theology of conversion is revealed as a synthesis of biblical and philosophical structures.

This synthesis is brought into sharper focus by Augustine's final account of intellectual conversion. In book 7 we are presented with a portrait of Augustine at the summit of Neo-Platonic learning. But he recognizes that it is not enough:

> So it was with the most intense desire that I seized upon the sacred writings of your Spirit, and especially the Apostle Paul. Those difficult passages, where at one time he seemed to me to contradict himself, and where the text of his discourse appeared to be at variance with the testimonies of the law and the prophets, melted away. I saw those pure writings as having one single aspect, and I learned to exult with joy. I made a beginning, and whatever truths I had read in those other works I here found to be uttered along with the praise of your grace, so that whosoever sees may not glory, as if he had not received not merely what he sees but also his very ability to see. (7:21)

Augustine's reading of Paul gives him a Pisgah sight of the Promised Land, but his passage there depends upon God's grace. For only grace can move his will. Augustine is like the philosophers he describes elsewhere as seeing the true country from afar, but not knowing the road that leads there.[1]

This is how book 7 concludes, with Augustine reading Paul on the farther shore:

> It is one thing to behold from a wooded mountain peak the land of peace, but to find no way to it, and to strive in vain towards it by unpassable ways, ambushed and beset by fugitives and deserters, under their leader, the lion and the dragon. It is a different thing to keep to the way that leads to that land, guarded by the protection of the heavenly commander, where no deserters from the heavenly army lie in wait

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[1] _Tractatus in Joannis evangelium_ 2:3-4.

> like bandits. They shun that way, like a torture. In a wondrous way all these things penetrated my very vitals, when I read the words of that least of your apostles, and meditated upon your works, and trembled at them. (7:21)

This is as far as Augustine can proceed by himself. He has followed a long uphill path of intellectual turnings, but neither Neo-Platonism nor an understanding of Paul's letters can effect a moral or spiritual conversion. That must await God's initiative in the garden. Only then can Augustine recapitulate his dependence upon God: "For you had converted me to yourself." (8:12)

Thus we have discovered two structures of conversion in the Confessions. The first is rooted in the Old and New Testaments. In it can be distinguished four moments: first, the wandering of sin and death; second, the call of God's divine initiative; third, man's response of turning from his idols to follow God's lead; and fourth, the new life upon which conversion opens.

The second structure of conversion is rooted in Greek philosophy, especially in Platonism and Neo-Platonism. In it can be distinguished two radical steps. The first is a turning within oneself and away from the senses which drive one to the outer world. The second step is a further turning in contemplation to the sphere of the intellect.

Augustine attempted a synthesis of the two structures. He Christianized the second step of the Neo-

Platonic structure by identifying Paul's theology of conversion with it. Man, using reason only, is capable of intellectual conversion, of turning within himself to his memory and intelligence. But spiritual conversion depends upon the initiative of God's grace which can move man's will to rise above himself.

Thus we can speak of two structures of conversion: one Christian, the other philosophical. However, as our study of Augustine's Confessions has revealed, both of these structures involve the same four moments. The most variable is the second. In Christian conversion this moment of initiative belongs to God alone. Without the call of his grace there can be no true conversion. To argue differently, that is, to say that man can turn to God on his own power or merits, is to find oneself in the Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian camp. In philosophical conversion the initiative of the second moment is man's, though it may be mediated by reason, a philosophical system, or some sort of gnosis.

I mentioned earlier that Augustine's narrative of both intellectual and religious conversions complicates the Confessions. Readers have often become confused, failing to distinguish between his earlier philosophical conversions and his final religious conversion in the garden at Milan. A further cause of this confusion is Augustine's behavior after his turning to orthodox Christianity: he slowly withdraws from his chair of rhetoric. Many readers and students of Augustine assume that genuine conversion demands a complete and radical change of life. This assumption generates such conclusions as Eugene TeSelle's: "It was, quite simply, a matter of deciding between two courses of life; it was even so mundane as to be a choice between two occupations: between a career as a successful rhetor and the life of philosophical contemplation with its usual accompaniment of sexual denial."[1] Augustine anticipated the puzzlement of his readers on this point:

> Some of Your servants, my brethren, may think that I sinned in this, since having enrolled with all my heart in Your service /a mundane choice between two occupations?/, I allowed myself to sit for so much as an hour in the chair of untruthfulness. It may be so. But, most merciful Lord, have You not pardoned and remitted this sin, along with others most horrible and deadly, in the holy waters of baptism? (9:2)

Brown says that what distinguished Augustine from other converts of his time was his refusal to repudiate his classical and philosophical background; after the garden at Milan "Augustine felt a free man again, able to pursue his interests with new energy and certainty. So intimate a readjustment did not need to be expressed in histrionic gestures, such as had been fashionable among the less balanced admirers of the monks, the learned Jerome among them."[1]

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[1] Augustine the Theologian (London: Burns and Oates, 1970), p. 39.

Conversion did not mean, for Augustine, a complete break from the past. Brown sums up the unique nature of this attitude:

> He was very definitely not a type croyant, such as had been common among educated men in the Latin world before his time. He did not believe that philosophy had proved sterile, and, so, that the methods of the philosophers could be replaced by a revealed Wisdom. Ambrose, for all his use of pagan authors, seems to have taken this old-fashioned view. He thought of himself first and foremost as a bishop, whose duty it was to understand and communicate to his flock the 'sea' of the Scriptures. Anything that could not be poured into this single mould was valueless. . . . The difference between the two men is a symptom of a change of momentous consequence in the culture of the Christian church.[2]

Just as Paul had put all his former learning as a Pharisee to post-conversion preaching of the Gospel, so Augustine is prepared to marshall his knowledge of philosophy with "a firm belief that a mind trained on philosophical methods could think creatively within the traditional orthodoxy of the church."[3]

Thus those who criticize Augustine for not making an immediate and radical break from his past life after the garden at Milan have missed the point that his seemingly tranquil behavior is actually revolutionary. Brown comments: "The revolution is all the more radical because Augustine, at the time, seems to have taken his own position entirely for granted: 'for I am just the sort of man who is impatient in his longing not only to take what is true on faith, but to come to understand it.'"[1]

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[1] Brown, p. 114. [2] Ibid., pp. 112-13.

[3] Ibid., p. 113.

It is quite true, however, that this revolutionary character of Augustine's attitude toward the past is not evident in the ninth book of the Confessions. He tells of his new life as a convert in the imagery of the Heavenly Jerusalem; that is, in the "country house at Cassiciacum, where we rested in You from the world's troubles, with the loveliness and eternal freshness of Your paradise . . . in the mountain of abundance, Your mountain, the mountain of richness." (9:3) After six months in this retreat he goes to Milan and is baptized along with his son, Adeodatus, and Alypius. (9:6) The ninth book ends with his account of Monica's death. Here the narrative portion of the Confessions ends. And here, as Brown points out, is where his contemporaries expected an end of the story:

> For what the conventional Christian wanted, was the story of a successful conversion. Conversion had been the main theme of religious autobiography in the ancient world. Such a conversion was often thought of as being as dramatic and as simple as the 'sobering up' of an alcoholic. Like all too many such converts, the writer will insist on rubbing into us that

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[1] Ibid.

> he is now a different person, that he has never looked back. Seen in such a light, the very act of conversion has cut the convert's life in two; he has been able to shake off his past. Conversion to philosophy or to some religious creed was thought of as being the attainment of some final security, like sailing from a stormy sea into the still waters of a port. . . . In the late fourth century, also, the drastic rite of baptism, coming as it often did in middle age, would only have further emphasized the break with one's past identity, that was so marked a feature of the unconventional idea of conversion.[1]

A mark of Augustine's unconventionality is his addition of four lengthy books to the Confessions, books which bring the story forward a decade into his present life as the new bishop of Hippo. Here the self-portrait gains depth as light from the present plays upon the past; and it is this psychological depth which makes the Confessions a true autobiography according to Roy Pascal's definition: "Autobiography is then an interplay, a collusion, between past and present; its significance is indeed more the revelation of the present situation than the uncovering of the past."[2]

Thus the last four books are an account of Augustine's present, an account of what we have called the fourth moment of conversion. It corresponds to Paul's maturing in Christ in which the apostle is afraid lest having preached the gospel, he himself may be lost.

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[1] Ibid., p. 177. [2] Pascal, p. 11.

Brown says of the tenth book: "This one book of the Confessions would have taken Augustine's readers by surprise: when it was read in Rome, for instance, Pelagius was 'deeply annoyed' by its tone."[1] The annoyance came because the "amazing Book Ten of the Confessions is not the affirmation of a cured man: it is the self-portrait of a convalescent."[2]

Just as Bunyan does in Pilgrim's Progress, Augustine sees that the Christian's pilgrimage does not end with moment of turning, rather it goes far beyond, even to the river of death. Such is the enduring fourth moment of conversion. It is a new life in Christ, but not one that arises full-grown out of the ashes of the old man; it is a maturing process which depends as much on God's grace as did the initial call to conversion. As Brown comments: "Augustine's sense of the dangers of identifying himself exclusively with his conscious good intentions, underlies the refrain that so shocked Pelagius: 'command what you wish, but give what you command.'"[3]

Thus at the end of the Confessions we find Augustine, standing like Janus with one face upon his past and one on his future. He looks back on the confession of his past life, on the narrative which fills the first nine books, and he expounds his notion of memory which allowed this past to be opened to himself and his readers:

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[1] Brown, p. 177. [2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 179.

> See now how great a space I have covered in my memory, in search of Thee, O Lord; and I have not found Thee outside it. For I find nothing concerning Thee but what I have remembered from the time I first learned of Thee. From that time, I have never forgotten Thee. For where I found truth, there I found my God, who is Truth Itself, and this I have not forgotten from the time I learned it. Thus from the time I learned of Thee, when I turn my mind to Thee and find delight in Thee. These are my holy delights, which in Thy mercy Thou hast given me, looking upon my poverty. (10:24)

Augustine also looks upon his future: at his temptations, at his life of maturing in Christ. He sees that the means of his growth are the scriptures. And thus, the last three books of the Confessions are a meditation on the first lines of Genesis. Brown and other commentators have explained the addition of these chapters as Augustine's attempt to show the reader how his present life is spent; but it is more. It is a portrait of Augustine's present, but also the structure of his maturing in Christ. If the first nine books of the Confessions had been a process of self-awareness through memory and confession, the last three are a process of maturing through the understanding of the scriptures.

As we mentioned earlier, Augustine's Confessions forms a bridge between the theology of conversion and the literary patterning of it. We now turn to studies of Dante, Bunyan, and Joyce as they grapple with their own experiences of conversion. Each will take a Janus-like stance similar to Augustine's. At the end of their autobiographical works (_Vita nuova_, _Grace Abounding_, and _Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man_) they will look backwards and forwards. In the structure of conversion "forwards," of course, is the moment of maturing in Christ. But whereas Augustine looked forward and saw his new work in terms of writing theology (understanding the scriptures), Dante, Bunyan, and Joyce will see theirs in terms of imaginative literature. And so each will produce his major work in the afterglow of conversion, whether religious or artistic.

PART II

THE LITERARY TREATMENT OF CONVERSION

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CHAPTER III

DANTE ALIGHIERI'S VITA NUOVA AND COMMEDIA

The theme of conversion is central in Dante's work, central to both the matter and the form—better, to the experience and the technique—of the Vita nuova and the Commedia. We noted in the introduction to this paper that A. C. Charity concludes simply that "The Divine Comedy is a poem about conversion."[1] Dante recognized that the experience of conversion is the starting point and basis of Christian life. A man's turning to follow God—and the reciprocal turning away from whatever distracts him from God—is the metaphor at the heart of this experience. A Christian's faith is rooted in the event of his turning to God; and if we accept the classic definition of theology, "fides quaerens intellectum," then so is his theology.

Besides this primary meaning of conversion as a turning to God, there are analogous turnings which are more or less closely related. A cursory glance at the

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[1] Charity, p. 167.

Vita nuova and Commedia reveals that several of these analogous turnings are operative. One might be called a political conversion. The full title of the Commedia contains a hint of its presence: "Incipit Comoedia Dantiis Aligherii, Florentini natione, non moribus"—Here begins the Comedy of Dante Aligheri, a Florentine by birth, not by character. This reveals a radical change in Dante's attitude toward his native city, a change which took place between his completion of the Vita nuova and his beginning of the Commedia. He examines this change from every angle throughout the latter work. Similarly described and discussed are his post-exile conversions from basic political impartiality to adherence to the White cause and then finally, the most radical turning of all, to becoming his own party: "te fia bello / averti fatta parte per te stesso"—your fame shines the brigher for having become a party of your own.[1]

The second type of conversion which helps structure Dante's works is what Bernard Lonergan calls a moral conversion, one in which the convert turns from satisfactions to values.[1] The most striking example of this type is found in the _Vita nuova_ when, as Charles Singleton describes it, Dante turns from an erotic love for Beatrice to a love of charity. Singleton has examined this instance of moral conversion in great detail. One of his conclusions will serve to illustrate how this conversion operates:

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[1] Paradiso 17:69. Italian quotations from the Commedia are from the editions of Charles S. Singleton (4 vols. /Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970-73/) and John D. Sinclair (3 vols. /New York: Oxford University Press, 1961/). Translations are either those of John Ciardi (3 vols. /New York: New American Library, 1961/), Singleton, Sinclair, or occasionally my own.

> The disappearance of the God of love from the _Vita Nuova_ is nothing less than a deliberate removal. That removal, however, is all in the way of recantation of troubadour love which is the veriest sign and symbol of such love. But if this is recantation, it is very unlike the traditional kind, because even if the God is abolished, love of woman is not abandoned. Beatrice remains. In fact, the whole authority of Love is transferred to her. Beatrice is Love, and Beatrice remains to the end. Yet, between love of her and love of God there is no conflict. When the _Vita Nuova_ ends, it faces God; but it keeps Beatrice.[2]

A third type of conversion found in Dante's writings is that of artistic or stylistic conversion. A good example of this comes in chapter 18 of the _Vita nuova_ as Dante changes the aim of his love. No longer will he seek the joy to be found in her greeting, that is, in

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[1] _Method in Theology_ (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), pp. 240-43.

[2] _An Essay on the "Vita Nuova"_ (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), pp. 74-75.

Beatrice herself, but rather "In quella parole che lodano la donna mia"—in words which praise my lady.[1] This resolve becomes the pivotal point of the book. Whereas the first poems in the work are similar to the rather studied manner of Provence, in the canzone which follows, the reader notices an unmistakable difference. The first canzone is in a radically new style, the *dolce stil nuovo*. This "sweet new style" becomes a subject of discussion later on in the *Purgatorio* when Dante tells the soul of Bonagiunta: "quando / Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo / ch'e' ditta dentro vo significando"—I am one who, when Love inspires me, takes note, and goes setting it forth after the fashion which he dictates within me. (24:52-54)

Another example of artistic conversion in Dante comes in the radical shift from the *Vita nuova* to the *Commedia*. Here the turning is revealed by the profound differences between the two works. Dante prepares the reader for this quantum leap when he says at the conclusion of the *Vita nuova* that:

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[1] Italian quotations from the *Vita nuova* are from the edition of Aldo Vallone (Vol. 3 of the *Scrittori classici Italiani* [Turin, 1966]). Translations are either by Barbara Reynolds (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), or Mark Musa, new ed., with an essay (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, A Midland Book, 1973). Quotations will be numbered in the text according to chapter.

> Appresso questo sonetto apparve a me una mirabile visione, ne la quale io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non dire piú di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potesse piú degnamente trattare di lei. E di venire a ciò io studio quanto posso, sí com'ella sae veracemente. Sí che, se piacere sarà di colui a cui tutte le cose vivono, che la mia vira duri per alquanti anni, io spero di dicer di lei quello che mai non fue detto d'alcuna.
>
> After this sonnet there appeared to me a marvelous vision in which I say things which made me decide to write no more of this blessed one until I could do so more worthily. And to this end I apply myself as much as I can, as she indeed knows. Thus if it shall please Him by whom all things live that my life continue for a few years, I hope to compose concerning her what has never been written in rhyme of any woman. (42)

One other artistic conversion which must be mentioned—if only because it is such a departure from what had been attempted before in narrative art—is Dante's use of addresses to the reader in the Commedia. Erich Auerbach has thoroughly discussed this "new creation," this "new relationship between reader and poet," and has concluded:

> Obviously, the originality of Dante's addresses to the reader is a symptom of a new relationship between both, one which is based on Dante's conception of his own role and function as a poet . . . to teach his fellow men what is wrong in the structure of human life at his special moment in history.[1]

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[1] "Dante's Addresses to the Reader," in American Critical Essays on the Divine Comedy, ed. Robert J. Clements (New York: New York University Press, 1967), pp. 37, 40, 44.

These three types of conversion—political, moral, and artistic—are related finally to the prime analogue: religious or spiritual conversion. In such religious conversions Henri Bouillard has pointed out that theological usage distinguishes two senses of turning to God: in one sense it is the act by which an unbeliever turns to God in faith; in another, the act by which a sinner repents and turns back to God.[1] The latter sense is the one operative in Dante; we will examine its main patterns in the *Vita nuova* and the *Commedia*.

Vita nuova

It could be argued that in the *Vita nuova* Dante initiates the rhythm and the imagery of conversion which will carry through until the last canto of the *Paradiso*. The introduction of Beatrice begins the process. The nine-year-old girl to whom Dante turns in chapter 2 of the *Vita nuova*, however, is hardly the Beatrice of the later chapters, "the woman whom my mind beholds in glory." In the course of the work she becomes progressively less flesh and blood, more angelic and divine. The most radical change in this direction comes in chapter 23 when Dante suddenly says to himself, "Di necessitade convene che la gentilissima Beatrice alcuna volta si muoia"—One day, inevitably, even your most gracious Beatrice must die. In the subsequent dream Dante beholds first a multitude of angels bearing her to Heaven, then a woman who says of Beatrice: "Io sono a vedere lo principio de la pace"—I now behold the fountainhead of peace. Dante wakes with the ejaculation: "O Beatrice, benedetta sie tu"—O Beatrice, blessed are you!

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[1] *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), pp. 1-2.

Gradually, the God of Love disappears from the scene to be replaced by Beatrice herself. Finally, in chapter 24, she can be called "Amore"—Love. In the same episode she is placed in an analogy with Christ, the true light, who had John the Baptist to prepare his way; she has Giovanna, nicknamed Primavera, to prepare hers. Divine metaphors begin to multiply. People she passes in the street say: "Questa non è femmina, anzi è uno de li bellissimi angeli del Cielo"—This is no woman; this is one of the fairest angels of Heaven. Others say "Questa è una maraviglia; che benedetto sia lo Segnore, che sí mirabilmente sae adoperare"—She is a miracle; blessed be the Lord who can create such marvels! (26) Throughout the Vita nuova she is called "gracious" and "gift of grace," but the epithets become more literal as Beatrice more closely approaches divinity. Finally Dante associates her with the Trinity: "ch'ella era uno nove, cioè uno miracolo, la cui radice, cioè del miracolo, è solamente la mirabile

Trinitade"—she was a nine, that is, a miracle, of which the root, that is, of the miracle, is nothing other than the miraculous Trinity itself. (29)

Thus the Beatrice to whom Dante first turns in an adolescent love, evolves in his imagination into a God-bearer, a source of grace. She becomes so closely associated with divinity that turning to her is no longer a function of erotic love but of charity. Thus after Beatrice's death—there is little mention of her mortal passing since she had been transformed into a heavenly being well before her death—when Dante turns his attentions to the lady-in-the-window, this is more than a mere dalliance. It is an affront to divinity, a falling from grace. This accounts for Dante's remorse after Beatrice appears to him in a vision:

> Allora cominciai a pensare de lei; a ricordandomi di lei secondo l'ordine del tempo passato, lo mio cuore cominciò dolorosamente a pentere de lo desiderio a cui sí vilmente s'avea lasciato possedere alquanti die contra la costanzia de la ragione: e discacciato questo cotale malvagio disiderio, sí si rivolsero tutti li miei pensamenti a la loro gentilissima Beatrice.
>
> Then I began to think about her and as I recalled her through the sequence of time past my heart began to repent sorrowfully of the desire by which it had so basely allowed itself to be possessed for some days against the constancy of reason; and when this evil desire had been expelled all my thoughts returned once more to their most gracious Beatrice.(39)

Dante's apparent repentance and return to Beatrice contains what we have already seen to be the four moments of religious conversion: the sinner's negligence, the call of God's grace (here, by the vision of the gracious Beatrice), the sinner's response of turning, and finally the new life that results.

In the _Vita nuova_ this fourth moment is perhaps found in Dante's resolve to compose a new work which is worthy of Beatrice. This resolution is a link between the _Vita nuova_ and the _Commedia_, but it is not the only link any more than the relationship between Dante and Beatrice is the only one. Just as Beatrice becomes progressively a divine image throughout the book, so other images take on added significance. Journey or pilgrimage imagery has become more complex as Beatrice takes on more the aura of a shrine. Visionary images have swelled in number and importance until it is difficult to distinguish dream from reality, a phenomenon upon which the whole _Commedia_ will be constructed. Finally the imagery of Heaven and Hell which begins to amass in the _Vita nuova_ prepares the way for their monumental treatment in the _Commedia_.

In sum, the _Vita nuova_ at first reading not only introduces the rhythm and imagery of conversion, it also makes the religious conversion of the _Commedia_ possible in its divinization of Beatrice set over against Dante's fall and remorse. Where before there could be only the love of a man and a woman isolated from a conversion of a man to God, now there is the possibility—still in germ—of a man's love for a woman being subsumed in his conversion to God.

The Vita nuova, however, demands a second and more critical reading. What we have said thus far about conversion seems to ring true, but it results only from an attempt to apply theological categories to the Vita nuova. We have not considered the imaginative patternings of conversion-experience as they emerge from the totality of the work itself. We have recognized the rhythm and imagery of conversion, but we have not asked about Dante's technique of revealing this rhythm and imagery. We must now examine this technique, for, as we quoted Mark Schorer in the Introduction to this study, "technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and finally, of evaluating it."[1]

Fortunately, Mark Musa has studied Dante's technique in a brilliant essay on the Vita nuova. He begins by distinguishing between Dante-as-artist and Dante-as-protagonist. This seems a simple and natural distinction for those of us who have grown up with the New Criticism; however, a failure to make just such a distinction has contaminated much of the criticism of Dante's extremely subtle work. As Musa concludes:

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[1] Schorer, p. 9.

> We must imagine the poet, between the age of twenty-seven and thirty-five, as having already glimpsed the possibility of what was to be his terrible and grandiose masterpiece; we must imagine him rereading the love poems of his earlier years—a number of them, surely, with embarrassment. He would also have come to see Beatrice, too, as she was destined to appear in the Divine Comedy, and indeed, as she does appear briefly in the Vita Nuova: in that essay (XXIX) on the miraculous quality of the number 9, which is the square of the number 3, that is of the Trinity, and which is Beatrice herself. Having arrived at this point, he would have chosen, then, several of his earlier love poems, including many that exhibit his younger self at his worst, in order to offer a warning example to other young lovers and especially to other love-poets.[1]

Dante is looking back on the experience of his youth and composes a work in which he both describes and evaluates these experiences. As Musa expresses it, "the more mature Dante is re-evoking his youthful experiences in a way to point up the folly, or the ignorance, of his youthful self."[2] We will see later how James Joyce attempts the same thing in The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. In both cases the more mature artist, not only writes about his youthful experiences, he also allows the technique or style of the work to mirror his immaturity.

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[1] Musa, pp. 169-70. [2] Ibid., p. 169.

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Thus there is a certain irony present in the Vita nuova. The tears, the self-pity, the pedantic divisioni of the poems, the sudden intrusions of aesthetic theory, the lack of concrete detail, the uneven quality of the poetry, all contribute to a portrait of Dante's youthful aspirations and follies.

What does this say about the protagonist's earnest considerations about conversion? In chapter 18 he says that he has undergone an artistic conversion:

> E però propuosi di prendere per matera de lo mio parlare sempre mai quello che fosse loda de questa gentilissima e pensando molto a ciò, pareami avere impresa troppo alta matera quanto a me, sí che non ardia di cominciare; e cosí dimorai alquanti dí con desiderio di dire e con paura di cominciare.
>
> And so I decided to take as the theme of my writing from then on whatever was praise of this most gracious being. Reflecting deeply on this, it seemed to me that I had undertaken too loftly a theme for my powers, so much so that I was afraid to enter upon it; and so I remained for several days desiring to write and afraid to begin.

Here we can believe the youthful Dante on his word, or we can examine his later poetry to see if, in fact, he did undergo just such an artistic conversion. Following the latter option, Musa makes a careful analysis of Dante's subsequent poetry and concludes that while the canzone which follows shows a definite change,it is shortlived and Dante soon falls back into his former poetry of self-centered pity over his plight. Thus we can conclude with Musa that Dante-as-protagonist has not undergone a real artistic conversion. The very technique of the Vita nuova delivers this verdict.

Likewise, we can question Dante's repentance in chapter 39 after he has seen a vision of Beatrice in glory and realizes the baseness of his infatuation with the lady-in-the-window:

> Allora cominciai a pensare di lei; e recordanomi di lei secondo l'ordine del tempo passato, lo mio cuore cominciò dolorosamente a pentere de lo desiderio a cui sí vilmente s'avea lasciato possedere alquanti die contra la costanzia de la ragione; e discacciato questo cotale malvagio desiderio, sí si rivolsero tutti li miei pensamenti a la loro gentilissima Beatrice.
>
> Then I began to think about her and as I recalled her through the sequence of time past my heart began to repent sorrowfully of the desire by which it had so basely allowed itself to be possessed for some days against the constancy of reason; and when this evil desire had been expelled all my thoughts returned once more to their most gracious Beatrice.

Once more we must ask whether Dante did in fact undergo the conversion he claims. That is, did he turn from his "malavagio disiderio" to "la constanzia de la ragione"? We need look no farther than his next two sentences:

> E dico che d'allora innanzi cominciai a pensare di lei sí con tutto lo vergognoso cuore, che li sospiri manifestavano ciò molte volte; però che tutti quasi diceano nel loro uscire quello che nel cuore si ragionava, cioè lo nome di quella gentilissima, e come si partio da noi. E molte volte avvenia che tanto dolore avea in sé alcuno pensero, ch'io dimenticava lui e là dov'io era.

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> And I say that from then onwards I began to think of her so much with the whole of my remorseful heart that frequently my sighs made this evident, expressing as they issued what my heart was saying, that is, the name of this most gracious soul and how she had departed from us. It often happened that a thought would be so laden with grief that I forgot what the thought had been and where I was.

It seems evident that this is no conversion to "la costanzia de la ragione." It is rather a resumption of that self-pity which had originally led him into the relationship with the lady-in-the-window.

All this forces us to conclude that Dante-the-protagonist is no judge of his own conversion. Dante-the-poet makes this clear by the juxtaposition of conversion imagery with a pre-conversion reality. However, in the penultimate chapter of the book (41), the young Dante dwells upon the spirit of the pilgrims he sees passing through the city. Here in the last poem of the _Vita nuova_ we see—at least in the quatrains—a recognition of the vision which will only be fully realized in the _Paradiso_. However, as Musa puts it, "the glory of the quatrains gives way to the bewilderment and disequilibrium of the tercets."[1]

> Oltre la spera che piú larga gira
> passa 'l sospiro ch'esce del mio core:
> intelligenza nova, che l'Amore
> piagendo mette in lui, pur su lo tira.

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[1] Ibid., p. 166.

Quand'elli è giunto là dove disira,
vede una donna, che riceve onore,
e luce sí, che per lo suo splendore
lo peregrino spirito la mira.

Vedela tal, che quando 'l mi ridice,
io no lo intendo, sí parla sottile
al cor dolente, che lo fa parlare.

So io che parla di quella gentile,
però che spesso ricorda Beatrice,
sí ch'io lo 'ntendo ben, donne mie care.

Beyond the sphere that makes the widest round,
passes the sigh arisen from my heart;
a new intelligence that Love in tears
endowed it with its urging it on high.

Once arrived at the place of its desiring,
it sees a lady held in reverence,
splendid in light, and through her radiance
the pilgrim spirit looks upon her being.

But when it tries to tell me what it says,
I cannot understand the subtle words
it speaks to the sad heart that makes it speak.

I know it tells of that most gracious one,
for I often hear the name of Beatrice.
This much, at least, is clear to me, dear ladies.

Not much, that is to say, is clear to Dante-the-protagonist at the end of the _Vita nuova_. All conversions have failed; and so the book ends on a note of failure. The only success seems to be that Dante recognizes the need for conversion and the fact that it will necessarily involve a Beatrice who has far transcended the once-living, recently-dead Beatrice for whom he has wallowed in the folly and self-pity of much of the narrative. He has glimpsed this new Beatrice in chapter 29, and he has glimpsed his own vocation in the passing of the pilgrims in 41. This dawning vocation, which will fill the Commedia, is in total contrast to the concerns of the Vita nuova; as Musa well emphasizes:

> The contrast between the protagonist of the Vita Nuova, with his self-centeredness and provincialism, and the protagonist of the Divine Comedy, to whom the goal of the beatific vision soon comes to be the unique concern, is obvious. And the story of a young Florentine man of letters, moving through familiar streets, will give way to that of the pilgrim, Everyman, moving through the strange (and never before traveled by moral man) topography of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise.[1]

In the last chapter of the book, Dante has a vision which he does not describe. As a result of it he breaks off his writing for the time being. At the same time he anticipates a new work (a mature work?) in which he will succeed where he has failed in the Vita nuova:

> Appresso questo sonetto apparve a me uno mirabile visione, ne la quale io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potesse più degnamente trattare di lei. E di venire a ciò io studio quanto posso, sì com'ella sae veracemente. Sì che, se piacere sarà di colui a cui tutte le cose vivono, che la mia vita duri per alquanti anni, io spero di dicer di lei quello che mai non fue detto d'alcuna. E poi piaccia a colui che è sire de la cortesia, che la mia anima se ne possa gire a vedere la gloria de la sua donna, cioè di quella benedetta Beatrice, la quale gloriosamente mira ne la faccia di colui qui est per omnia secula benedictus.

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[1] Ibid., p. 165.

> After I wrote this sonnet there came to me a miraculous vision in which I saw things that made me resolve to say no more about this blessed one until I would be capable of writing about her in a nobler way. To achieve this I am striving as hard as I can, and this she truly knows. Accordingly, if it be the pleasure of Him through whom all things live that my life continue for a few more years, I hope to write of her that which has never been written of any other woman. And then may it please the One who is the Lord of graciousness that my soul ascend to behold the glory of its lady, that is, of that blessed Beatrice, who in glory contemplates the countenance of the One *qui est per omnia secula benedictus*.

Dante's breaking off of the *Vita nuova*, his recognition that he has not yet written anything worthy of Beatrice, his reliance on the grace of God, and the insight that his soul must rise (be converted?) to where it can behold the "benedetta Beatrice," all this is a judgment of Dante-the-poet upon the attempts of Dante-the-young-man. Musa agrees when he says that "in the final chapter of the *Vita nuova* Dante the Poet expresses his dissatisfaction with his protagonist, or, rather, he allows the protagonist to express his dissatisfaction with himself."[1]

Inferno

The *Inferno* begins with Dante lost in a dark wood, one more indication that the conversions of the *Vita* nuova were fatuous. He does not know how he came to stray there, but only that he awakens to find himself in a terrible wilderness. There is only one gleam of hope in the midst of his wanderings:

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[1] Ibid., p. 167.

> Ma poi ch'i' fui al piè d'un colle giunto,
>   là dove terminava quella valle
>   che m'avea di paura il cor compunto.
>
> But at the far end of that valley of evil whose maze had sapped my very heart with fear! I found myself before a little hill. (1:13-15)

This is the hill of repentance. He attempts to climb it but is turned back by three beasts until finally: "venendomi 'ncontro, a poco a poco / mi ripigneva là dove 'l sol tace"—I wavered back, and still the beast pursued, forcing herself against me bit by bit until I slid back into the sunless wood. (58-60)

There is no way Dante can escape from sin by himself and mount the hill of repentance. In this moment of complete hopelessness ("mentre ch'i' rovinava in basso loco"—as I fell to my soul's ruin) Virgil appears to him. He has been sent by Beatrice to lead Dante to the mountain of repentance, but not by the direct path which is guarded by the beasts. Virgil, who symbolizes art and humanism, will lead Dante by another way to the Mount of Purgatory: down through the tortuous windings of Hell. Beatrice (divine grace) cannot reach Dante directly, plunged as he is in the darkness of sin; she can only send the natural wisdom of Virgil to show him the depths of depravity that is Hell. Only when Dante—guided by Virgil's natural wisdom—has plumbed the depths of sin in the *Inferno* can he climb the mountain of repentance in the *Purgatorio* and finally soar—with Beatrice's guidance—up to the ecstasy of the *Paradiso*.

If we are ever to understand this journey of Dante's, much less his succession of conversions, we must grasp the medieval notion of mediation. Especially since it is on this very notion that Dante will differ most radically from John Bunyan and James Joyce, whose journeys we must also consider in later chapters.

As C. S. Lewis has ably shown, there was a medieval model of reality which Dante naturally followed. Lewis traces the medieval model of mediation back to Apuleius' "De Deo Socratis" where the principle is stated that the gods deal with men only through intermediaries.[1] The concrete effect of this principle of mediation is what Lewis calls "the principle of the triad":

> The clearest statement of it in Plato himself comes from the *Timaeus*: 'it is impossible that two things only should be joined together without a third. There must be some bond in between

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[1] "Through these intermediaries [daemons], and through them alone, we mortals have any intercourse with the gods. For θεὸς ἀνθρώπῳ οὐ μίγνυται; as Apuleius translates it, *nullus deus miscetur hominibus*, no god converses with men." *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 41.

> both to bring them together' (31^{b-c}). The principle is not stated but assumed in the assertion of the Symposium that god does not meet man. They can encounter one another only indirectly; there must be some wire, some medium, some introducer, some bridge —a third thing of some sort—in between them. Daemons fill the gap. We shall find Plato himself, and the medievals, endlessly acting on their principle; supplying bridges, as it were, 'third things' —between reason and appetite, soul and body, king and commons.[1]

Of course, Dante could also find theological reasons from the Christian tradition which supported the principle of mediation:

> . . . Pseudo-Dionysius is as certain as Plato or Apuleius that God encounters Man only through a 'mean'. . . . He cannot deny that Theophanies, direct appearance of God Himself to patriarchs and prophets, seem to occur in the Old Testament. But he is quite sure that this never really happens. These visions were in reality mediated through celestial, but created, beings 'as though the order of divine law laid it down that creatures of a lower order should be moved God-ward by those of a higher.'[2]

Thomas Aquinas, the authority who was no doubt most influential in Dante's thinking on this matter, agrees with pseudo-Dionysius that there is an order through which God communicates with men. He concludes that "it is fitting for the mystery of the Incarnation to be announced to the Mother of God by an angel . . . that in this also might be maintained the order established by God, by which Divine things are brought to men by means of angels."[1] In addition, Thomas leaves open the possibility that others, besides the hierarchies of angels, can serve as mediators, while at the same time maintaining the doctrine that Christ himself is the only true and perfect mediator:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 43-44. [2] Ibid., pp. 72-73.

> Christ alone is the perfect mediator of God and men, inasmuch as, by his death, He reconciled the human race to God. . . . However, nothing hinders certain others from being called mediators, in some respect, between God and man, for as much as they cooperate in uniting men to God, dispositively or ministerially.[2]

But although Christ appears in the final canto of the _Paradiso_, his presence in the _Commedia_ is never as a mediator. And this because Christ was not immediately central to the medieval theology in which Dante grew up. The reaction against Arianism had so exalted the divinity of Christ that men had no possibility of entering into a direct relationship with him.[3] Thus the need for a

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[1] _Summa theologica_ III, 30, 2.

[2] Ibid., III, 26, 1.

[3] The medieval Church was reacting against what Joseph Jungmann calls "the Arian misinterpretation of the priestly and mediatory position of Christ." _The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer_ (Staten Island: Alba House, 1965), pp. 173-74. He explains elsewhere:

> "Arianism had questioned the true divinity of Christ. On the Catholic side this necessitated the defence and consequent emphasis of all which expressed the divine power and dignity of our Lord. This involved the Christmas and Epiphany series of ideas. On the other side it meant a certain suppression of those lines of thought which allowed of Arian misunderstanding. This involved the Lord's mediatorial office in

hierarchy of mediators—angels, Mary, the saints, and finally for Dante, Beatrice—to intercede between Christ and men.

And so, returning to the Inferno, we find in the second canto a whole succession of mediators between God and Dante, moving from the Virgin Mary to Lucy to Beatrice, and ultimately to Virgil who is sent to rescue Dante from the dark wood and to act as his first guide along the journey of conversion.

Even with these mediators, however, Dante's journey will not be an easy one. Before starting out he is almost overwhelmed by fear. Virgil must encourage him:

> "S'i' ho ben la parola tua intesa,"
> rispuose del magnanimo quell' ombra,
> "l'anima tua è da viltade offesa;
> la qual molte fiate l'omo ingombra
> sí che d'onrata impresa lo rivolve,
> come falso veder bestia quand' ombra."
>
> "I understand from your works and the look in your eyes," that shadow of magnificence answered me,"your soul is sunken in that cowardice that bears down many men, turning their course and resolution by imagined perils, as his own shadow turns the frightened horse." (2:43-48)

This is the great temptation for one undergoing conversion: to turn back to sin in the midst of turning to God. The leeks and garlic of Egypt are always foremost in the imaginations of those wandering in the desert. Throughout

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His transfigured humanity of Easter." Pastoral Liturgy (New York: Herder and Herder, 1962), p. 364.

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his journey into the depths of Hell Dante undergoes other temptations symbolized by his fainting, weeping, or lingering along the way. To counter these temptations he shows revulsion for sin by several outbursts of rage and indignity against damned souls.

Meanwhile Virgil is always there beside him, reprimanding him when he lingers and encouraging him when he rages against damned sinners. Virgil has descended into the pit of Hell once before, shortly after his death when a sorceress had charmed him into bringing back a soul from the lowest depths. He knows the way but is frequently amazed by the havoc worked on the landscape by the earthquake that accompanied Christ's crucifixion and subsequent harrowing of Hell.

An understanding of Virgil's importance to the medieval imagination is central to an appreciation of his function as mediator in the Commedia. He was not a Christian, having died in 19 B.C., and yet he was considered an "animus naturaliter Christiana"—a natural Christian—in the middle ages for his apparent prophecy of Christ's birth in his fourth Eclogue. As the most perfect pagan, he came to symbolize all that was good in non-Christian arts and learning. Sent by divine grace in the person of Beatrice, he was worthy to guide Dante through the sin and temptation of the Inferno to an understanding of man's depravity. Only through such understanding can there be any conversion.

Virgil, of course, is fated to remain for eternity within the confines of Hell since he never knew Christ. Yet there is a special place for the virtuous pagans and those who die unbaptized: the first ring, Limbo, where the only pain is that of being separated from God. When Dante looks about Limbo he sees the shades of Homer, Horace, Ovid, Electra, Hector, Aeneas, Caesar, Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Avicenna, and Averrhoes. These, and many others, are the virtuous pagans or Muslims who have reached the artistic, intellectual, and political heights, but cannot gain the heavenly ones because of their ignorance of Christ.

Yet despite this ignorance, Virgil guides Dante into a deeper and deeper understanding of Hell and sin and moral death. They finally reach the bottom of the pit where the gigantic winged body of Satan is frozen in his own tears. At the center of the earth, they can descend no farther into sin and depravity and suffering.

> Com' a lui piacque, il collo li avvinghiai;
>   ed el prese di tempo e loco poste,
>   e quando l'ali fuoro aperte assai,
> appigliò sé a le vellute coste;
>   di vello in vello giù discese poscia
>   tra 'l folto pelo e le gelate croste.
> Quando noi fummo là dove la coscia
>   si volge, a punto in sul grosso de l'anche,
>   lo duca, con fatica e con angoscia,
> volse la testa ov' elli avea le zanche,
>   e aggrappossi al pel com' om che sale,
>   si che 'n inferno i' credea tornar anche.
> "Attienti ben, chè per cotali scale,"
>   disse 'l maestro, ansando com' uom lasso,
>   "conviensi dipartir da tanto male."

> Then, as he bade, I clasped his neck, and he, watching for a moment when the wings were opened wide, reached over dexterously and seized the shaggy coat of the king demon; then grappling matted hair and frozen crusts from one tuft to another, clambered down. When we had reached the joint where the great thigh merges into the swelling of the haunch, my Guide and Master, straining terribly, turned his head to where his feet had been and began to grip the hair as if he were climbing; so that I thought we moved toward Hell again. "Hold fast!" my Guide said, and his breath came shrill with labor and exhaustion. "There is no way but by such stairs to rise above such evil." (34:70-84)

Thus at the very bottom of Hell comes the turning away from sin and the turning toward God—our earlier definition of conversion. Dante has gone as far into sin as possible; he has climbed down Satan's body, past the center of the earth, and now there is only one direction to go: upwards toward the Mount of Purgatory.

Virgil has led—and sometimes even carried—Dante through the first stage of his journey. The Virgin Mary ("Donna gentil nel ciel"—the Lady in Heaven) through Lucy and finally through Beatrice had sent Virgil to provide guidance. In this we have a descriptive statement about the need for mediated grace if man is to move forward at all. It seems clear that if the Inferno has anything to say about conversion it is this: man (in the person of Dante) can make no move in the journey of turning to God by himself; natural wisdom (Virgil) can lead him through the temptation of every type of sin and bring him ultimately to repentance, but even this natural wisdom comes from the grace of God (Beatrice).

All this seems evident on the descriptive or narrative level of the Commedia. As for the explanatory level of philosophy and theology, we must look to Dante's primary philosophical and theological source: Thomas Aquinas. In his Summa theologica we find an enumeration of the three types of conversion, a summary of the conversions to be found in the Commedia.

> Every movement of the will toward God can be termed a conversion to God. And so there is a threefold turning to God. The first is by the perfect love of God; this belongs to the creature enjoying the possession of God; and for such conversion, consummate grace is required. The next turning to God is that which merits beatitude; and for this there is required habitual grace, which is the principle of merit. The third conversion is that whereby a man disposes himself so that he may have grace; for this no habitual grace is required, but an operation of God, Who draws the soul towards Himself, according to Lam. 5.21: "Convert us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be converted."[1]

We note at once that Thomas lists these three conversions in their order of importance rather than in their order of occurrence in a Christian's life as Dante does. We note also that Thomas adds a distinction of the types of grace necessary for each conversion. Thus for the highest conversion—corresponding, as we shall see, to that of the *Paradiso*—consummate grace is needed. For the second—corresponding to that of the *Purgatorio*—habitual or sanctifying grace. For the initial conversion—which we have just seen in the *Inferno*—a grace which he does not name, but rather describes as "an operation of God, Who draws the soul towards Himself." In the theology of grace this is known as prevenient or actual grace.

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[1] I, 62, 2, as quoted in Singleton, Dante Studies 2: Journey to Beatrice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 39.

Thus we can say that Virgil is sent by means of prevenient grace. Throughout the *Inferno*, and most of the *Purgatorio*, he functions as a preparation for the habitual or sanctifying grace which Beatrice will mediate, in a sense *become*, for Dante at the summit of the Mount of Purgatory.

There is no question here of a Pelagian or semi-Pelagian position by which Dante somehow would proceed by his own good works apart from the help of God's grace. Thomas's formulation is followed throughout: "The divine assistance is not given to us because by our good deeds we previously move ourselves to obtain it, but rather do we advance by our good deeds, because of God's prevenient help."[1]

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[1] *Summa contra gentiles* III, 149.

Thus the first instance of conversion in the *Commedia* is one that Virgil mediates, one that takes place—except for its original impetus—within man's natural limitations.[1] Since Virgil continues to guide Dante through most of the *Purgatorio* as well, we must conclude that this first conversion will not be completed until Virgil finally withdraws and Beatrice becomes the mediator of Dante's second.[2]

Purgatorio

As the two travelers emerge from Hell to begin their climb up the mountain of repentance they meet Cato of Utica who guards the shores of Purgatory. Virgil explains their task: Dante's conversion. But his first explanation concerns his own part: "Da me non venni: / donna scese del ciel, per li cui prieghi / de la mia compagnia costui sovveni"—Of myself I came not: a lady descended from Heaven through whose prayers I succored this man with my company. (1:52-54) Virgil's human wisdom, as we have said before, can come to the sinner's aid only through the impetus of grace, here prevenient grace.

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[1] Singleton concludes: "The first conversion as such, if we hold to St. Thomas's formulation, does not extend so far as to include the moment when sanctifying grace is given, for that moment is itself the second conversion. Instead, the first conversion may extend only as far as the process of preparation or disposition of the matter extends—which, to return to the outlines of the event in the poem, is precisely as far as Virgil leads and no further." *Dante Studies 2*, pp. 47-48.

[2] Singleton summarizes the matter thus: "The first conversion is an *ordo*, that is, a providential ordering or directing of the creature by God. The order is natural, in that it is within confines which do not exceed human nature. But it is an order to an end. It is *ad gratiam*, having as its goal a grace which is beyond the natural." Ibid., p. 54.

Then Virgil goes on to tell Cato about Dante's plight and his own task:

> Questi non vide mai l'ultima sera;
>   ma per la sua follia le fu sì presso,
>   che molto poco tempo a volger era.
> Sì com' io dissi, fui mandato ad esso
>   per lui campare; e non li era altra via
>   che questa per la quale i' mi son messo.
>
> This man has still to see his final hour, though in the burning of his own madness he had drawn so near it his time was perilously short for turning. As I have told you, I was sent to show the way his soul must take for its salvation; and there is none but this by which I go. (58-63)

Virgil's wisdom can only show Dante the way to conversion; the final turning and the resulting freedom are up to Dante, cooperating with Heaven's power:

> Mostrata ho lui tutta la gente ria;
>   e ora intendo mostrar quelli spirti
>   che purgan sé sotto la tua balìa.

> Com' io l'ho tratto, saria lungo a dirti;
>   de l'alto scende virtù che m'aiuta
>   conducerlo a vederti e a udirti.
> Or ti piaccia gradir la sua venuta:
>   libertà va cercando, ch'è sì cara,
>   come sa chi per lei vita rifiuta.
>
> I have shown him the guilty people. Now I mean to lead him through the spirits in your keeping, to show him those whose suffering makes them clean. But what means I have led him to this strand to see and hear you, takes too long to tell: from Heaven is the power and the command. Now may his coming please you, for he goes to win his freedom; and how dear that is the man who gives his life for it best knows. (64-72)

Cato symbolizes the natural moral virtues. The travelers depend upon him for advice in order to proceed; this illustrates the Catholic view that grace does not do away with nature, but rather redeems and perfects it. The ascent of the Mount of Purgatory will become a moral progress in which grace strengthens and purifies the natural virtues. As Dante climbs the mountain his natural virtues will undergo a gradual purification until they are completely transformed by habitual grace at the end of the Purgatorio. Then Virgil will be able to accompany him no farther, and Beatrice will become Dante's guide.

Cato instructs Virgil to bind a reed (a symbol of humility) around Dante's waist, and to take up the dew (a biblical symbol of God's mercy) and wash his face of all the grime and tears that remain from the descent through Hell (surely reminiscent of baptism).

For this is Easter morning and the climb from now on must be made with a cheerful countenance.

As the two poets begin their ascent through the two terraces of Ante-Purgatory they meet those who gained salvation by repentance at the hour of death, souls who must wait a fixed time before entering the cleansing pains of Purgatory proper. They pass among the excommunicates and the late-repentant, then as night comes on Dante falls asleep and dreams the first of three dreams which occur on each of the three nights which he spends on the mountain.

These dreams mark important transitions in Dante's progress. The second will come after he has passed through the wall of fire on the last cornice; the third, after he has passed through the Lethe and into the Earthly Paradise. Here, he dreams that he has been snatched away by an eagle and awakes to find that Lucy has carried him to the gate of Purgatory. That Lucy symbolizes God's grace is clear. Dorothy Sayers comments:

> In the allegory, the intervention of Lucy means, I think, that in entering actively upon the way of Penitence and Purgation the soul is dependent upon God's grace. It is too great a leap for it to make by its natural light and natural powers, though these will, of course, accompany and assist it. Thus Lucy is sent from Heaven to carry Dante up, and Virgil only "comes

behind."[1]

Every soul must pass through this gate, either directly or by way of the two terraces of Ante-Purgatory, in order to enter Purgatory. Before passing through Dante must climb the three steps of penance: the white step of confession, the black of contrition, and the red of satisfaction. Guided by Virgil, Dante mounts the steps and humbly begs the Angel of the Lord to let him in. Then "Sette P ne la fronte mi descrisse / col punton de la spada, e 'Fa che lavi, / quando se' dentro, queste piaghe' disse"—seven P's, the seven scars of sin, his sword point cut into my brow; he said: 'Scrub off these wounds when you have passed within.' (9:112-14) The Angel unlocks the gate with two keys: one symbolic of the divine authority given to the Church to forgive sins and the other the skill of Church and priesthood to untangle the ties of sin.

The essential part which the Church plays in Dante's model of conversion is here made evident. The ecclesial role is also stressed in the liturgical character of the Purgatorio—its hymns, processions, and so forth. Together with the sacraments, liturgy is an essential way which the Church aids the Christian in his journey to God.[1]

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[1] The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, the Florentine, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers and Barbara Reynolds, 3 vols. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1949-62), 2:139.

Dante and Virgil pass into Purgatory with the Angel's admonition: "Intrate; ma facciovi accorti / che di fuor torna chi 'n dietro si guata"—Enter; but first be warned: do not look back or you will find yourself once more outside. (131-32) Now that Dante had turned to God he must not succumb to the temptation to turn back to the sin and the Inferno which lies behind him.

The two climb upwards through the seven cornices where Dante does penance for each of the capital sins. When they reach the final cornice, they come up against a wall of fire which they must pass through if they are to proceed any farther on the journey of conversion. Dante hesitates in fear; Virgil must encourage him, using once more the familiar imagery of turning:

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[1] John Ciardi outlines the sacraments allegorized in the Purgatorio:

> "The structure of Purgatory certainly suggests a parable of the soul's stages of sacred development: the dew, baptism; the gate of Purgatory, above, first communion; Virgil's certification of Dante as lord of himself (XXVII, 143), confirmation; and Dante's swoon and awakening (XXXI, 89), as extreme unction and the reception into the company of the blessed." Ciardi, 2:39.

Ciardi's general insight is correct, though he errs in the particulars. He mistakes the gate of Purgatory for first communion; it is clearly the sacrament of penance. If communion is figured at all, it is in Dante's final action of the Purgatorio as he drinks from the river Eunoë. Only then, as we will discuss later, does he enter into the company of the blessed—not, as Ciardi would have it, in canto 31 after passing through the Lethe. In the final analysis, however, until we learn more about the common sacramental practices of Northern Italy in Dante's time our observations must remain interesting but uncertain.

> "Pon giù omai, pon giù ogni temenza;
>   volgiti in qua e vieni: entra sicuro!"
>   E io pur fermo e contra coscienza.
> Quando mi vide star pur fermo e duro,
>   turbato un poco disse: "Or vedi, figlio:
>   tra Beatrice e te è questo muro."

> "Put away now, put away all fear, turn hitherward, come enter with confidence." And I still adamant and against my conscience. When he saw me stand there unmoved and stubborn, he said, a little vexed, "Now see, son, between Beatrice and you is this wall." (7:31-36)

Only the hope of seeing Beatrice can move Dante to turn away from fear and pass through the fire. He does and as the last P is stricken from his forehead they come in sight of the Earthly Paradise. This is as far as Virgil can guide Dante; natural wisdom has reached its limit, the natural virtues have reached perfection.[1] Virgil utters his last words:

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[1] In the De Monarchia, Dante outlines the two ends of man in a passage which serves as the definitive commentary on this pivotal episode in the Commedia:

> "Twofold, therefore, are the ends which unerring Providence has ordained for man: the bliss of this life, which consists in the functioning of his own powers, and which is typified by the earthly Paradise; and the bliss of eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of that divine vision to which he cannot attain by his own powers, except they be aided by the divine light, and this state is made intelligible by the celestial Paradise. These two states of bliss, like two different goals, man must reach by different ways. For we come to the first as we follow the philosophical teachings, applying them according to our moral and intellectual

> . . . "Il temporal foco e l'etterno
>   veduto hai, figlio; e se' venuto in parte
>   dov' io per me più oltre non discerno.
> Tratto t'ho qui con ingegno e con arte;
>   lo tuo piacere omai prendi per duce;
>   fuor se' de l'erte vie, fuor se' de l'arte.
> . . . .
> Non aspettar mio dir piú né mio cenno;
>   libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio,
>   e fallo fora non fare a suo senno;
> per ch'io te sovra te corono e mitrio."

> "My son," he said, "you now have seen the torment of the temporal and the eternal fires; here, now, is the limit of my discernment. I have led you here by grace of mind and art; now let your own good pleasure be your guide; you are past the steep ways, past the narrow part. . . . Expect no more of me in word or deed; here your will is upright, free, and whole, and you would be in error not to heed whatever your own impulse prompts you to; lord of yourself I crown and mitre you." (127-32, 139-42)

Crowned lord of himself by Virgil, Dante is ready to enter the Earthly Paradise. He finds himself in the sacred wood; a far cry from the dark wood from which he was rescued by Virgil. He comes to the river Lethe and beholds Matilda on the other side, a mere three paces away (the three steps of true repentance), but nevertheless beyond his ability to cross unaided.

Now the Heavenly Pageant unfolds before his eyes, culminating in the appearance of Beatrice. At the same

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capacities; and we come to the second as we follow the spiritual teachings which transcend human reason according to our theological capacities, faith, hope, and charity." *On World-Government (De Monarchia)*, trans. H. W. Schneider (Indianapolis: The Liberal Arts Press, 1957), 3:16.

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instant that Dante recognizes her he discovers that Virgil has vanished. Natural reason has brought Dante through his first conversion and to the banks of the Lethe, but only revelation can guide him to the forgetfulness of his sins and entrance into the Paradiso.

Beatrice states that if Dante is to achieve a complete conversion, she must reprimand him so that "m'intenda colui che di là piagne, / perché sia colpa e duol d'una misura"—he who weeps on that far bank may understand and feel a grief to match his guilt. (30: 107-8) Then she recounts the nature of Dante's sins, those sins which were only alluded to at the end of the Vita nuova:

> Alcun tempo il sostenni col mio volto:
>   mostrando li occhi giovanetti a lui,
>   meco il menava in dritta parte vòlto.
> Sì tosto come in su la soglia fui
>   di mia seconda etade e mutai vita,
>   questi si tolse a me, e diessi altrui.
> . . . .
> E volsi i passi suoi per via non vera,
>   imagini di ben seguendo false,
>   che nulla promession rendono intera.
> Né l'impetrare ispirazion me valse,
>   con le quali e in sogno e altrimenti
>   lo rivocai: sì poco a lui ne calse!
> Tanto giù cadde, che tutti argomenti
>   a la salute sua eran già corti,
>   fuor che mostrarli le perdute genti.
> Per questo visitai l'uscio d'i morti,
>   e a colui che l'ha qua su condotto,
>   li preghi miei, piangendo, furon porti.
>
> For a time I sustained him with my countenance: showing him my youthful eyes I led him with me turned toward the right goal. So soon as I was on the threshold of my second age and had changed life, this one took himself from me and gave himself to others. . . . He turned his steps along a way not true, following false

> images of good, which pay no promise in full. Nor did it avail me to obtain inspirations with which, both of dream and otherwise, I called him back, so little did he heed them. He fell so low that all means for his salvation were now short, save to show him the lost people. For this I visited the gate of the dead, and to him who has conducted him up hither my prayers were offered with tears. (121-26,130-41)

Beatrice continues to reprimand Dante, making clear what his response must be: "a tanta accusa / tua confession conviene esser congiunta"—to such an accusation your confession must be joined. (31: 5-6) Finally Dante is able to stutter out a reply:

> Piangendo dissi: "Le presenti cose
>   col falso lor piacer volser miei passi,
>   tosto che 'l vostro viso si nascose."
>
> Weeping I said, "The present things, with their false pleasure, turned my steps aside, as soon as your countenance was hidden." (34-36)

Having made his confession, he suddenly recognizes the true sinfulness of his life:

> Di penter sì mi punse ivi l'ortica,
>   che di tutte altre cose qual mi torse
>   più nel suo amor, più mi si fé nemica.
>
> And the nettle of remorse so stung me there that of all other things, that which had most turned me to love of it became most hateful to me. (85-87)

Dante swoons. When he awakes Matilda leads him through the Lethe and performs a last cleansing rite—echoing the baptismal cleansing rite which Virgil performed at the base of the Mount of Purgatory —in which he is dipped into the waters of forgetfulness and then made to drink them.[1] As he is drawn through the waters he hears Psalm 51, the "Asperges me," being sung. We have already seen that this psalm marked the highest note in the Old Testament theology of conversion. Although Dante only mentions the first words, he certainly intends the reader to reflect on the entire hymn of thanksgiving and its implications for the conversion event in progress:

> Purify me with hyssop until I am clean;
> wash me until I am whiter than snow.
>
> Instil some joy and gladness into me,
> let the bonds you have crushed rejoice again.
> Hide your face from my sins,
> wipe out all my guilt.

---

[1] Singleton's comments on this rite are interesting, but misleading:

> "Dante's crossing of the Lethe, immersed therein, is therefore the absolution which completes the act of penance as well as the pattern of justification. Dante is now absolved of his sins, has confessed to Beatrice, and may be led up to her by her handmaids, the seven virtues. . . . The reader will do well to distinguish this drinking and its significance from the immersion, as a kind of baptism (but not an actual baptism, for the sacrament of baptism is not to be repeated). Baptism absolves from the guilt of original sin, penance from that of personal sin, and it is personal sin for which Dante has felt contrition and to which he has confessed. . . . When Dante comes forth from the water of Lethe, his sins will be 'covered,' forgiven and remitted." Purgatorio, Vol. 2, Commentary, p. 770.

Here, surely, Singleton nods. In accordance with the perennial Catholic teaching, Dante's sins had been absolved and forgiven at the gate of Purgatory. His progress through the seven cornices was his penance by which he made satisfaction for the punishment due his sins.

God, create a clean heart in me,
put into me a new and constant spirit,
do not banish me from your presence,
do not deprive me of your holy spirit.

Be my saviour again, renew my joy,
keep my spirit steady and willing;
and I shall teach transgressors the way to you,
and to you the sinners will return.

Save me from death, God my saviour,
and my tongue will acclaim your righteousness;
Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will speak out your praise.

Sacrifice gives you no pleasure,
were I to offer holocaust, you would not have it.
My sacrifice is this broken spirit,
you will not scorn this crushed and broken heart.

Show your favour graciously to Zion,
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
Then there will be proper sacrifice to please you
—holocaust and whole oblation—
and young bulls to be offered on your altar. (7-19)

The mention of death in the psalm seems to indicate either that passing through the Lethe is an allegorical death, or that such a death is in the offing. It is important to remember, however, that the Earthly Paradise, as Dante states in the *De Monarchia*, is attainable on this side of death. The Celestial Paradise, which will be entered after two more cantos, is beyond death. Thus death, though it is not explicitly allegorized, must come in the waters of Eunoë.

But in the meantime, Dante emerges from the Lethe and hears three maidens—the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity—singing a song to Beatrice which is a prayer for her to convert Dante with her grace.

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> "Volgi, Beatrice, volgi li occhi santi,"
>   era la sua canzone, "al tuo fedele
>   che, per vederti, ha mossi passi tanti!
> Per grazia fa noi grazia che disvele
>   a lui lo bocca tua, sì che discerna
>   la seconda bellezza che tu cele."
>
> "Turn, Beatrice, turn your holy eyes upon your faithful one," was their song, "who has moved so many steps to see you. For grace do us the grace to unveil to him your mouth, that he may discern the second beauty which you conceal." (133-38)

With this, Dante looks upon Beatrice and, like Paul in his conversion experience of meeting the Lord, loses his sight: "e la disposizion ch'a veder èe / ne li occhi pur testé dal sol percossi, / sanza la vista alquanto esser me fée"—and as a man is blinded by the light when he has looked directly at the sun, just so I found that I had lost my sight. (32:10-12)

Now all that is left in the process of Dante's second conversion is to drink of the river Eunoë which strengthens the memory of all his good deeds, just as the Lethe had wiped away all the memory of his sins. At this point he enters into the fourth moment of conversion, that of the new man with a new life in a new creation. With just such a testimony Dante concludes the *Purgatorio* and prepares to enter the *Paradiso*:

> Io ritornai da la santissima onda
>   rifatto si come piante novelle
>   rinovellate di novella fronda,
> puro e disposto a salire a le stelle.

> I came back from those holiest waters new,
> remade, reborn, like a sun-wakened tree that
> spreads new foliage to the Spring dew to
> sweetest freshness, healed of Winter's
> scars; perfect, pure, and ready for the
> Stars. (33:142-45)

In sum, the pattern of conversion in the *Purgatorio* depends, as it did in the *Inferno*, upon the movement of grace. Where Virgil mediates prevenient grace, Beatrice mediates habitual or sanctifying. Thus any response of turning to God and away from sin is finally a response to grace freely given.

But within this response, the *Purgatorio* emphasizes the need for penitence. So function the seven cornices and Beatrice's stern reprimand of Dante. There is a debt to be paid, however joyful the thought of eventual entrance into Paradise while the suffering is borne.

This then is the final emphasis of the *Purgatorio*: that man's response to converting grace is one which demands penitential suffering for past sins. Only after his purgation process is completed can he be drawn into the new creation of Paradise.

Paradiso

Dante says in his letter to Can Grande that his purpose in the *Commedia* is to change people: "The aim of the whole /*Commedia*/ and of the part /*Paradiso*/ is to remove those living in this life from a state of misery, and to bring them to a state of happiness."[1] To this end, he describes his own changes or conversions. So far we have studied his first conversion which was mediated by Virgil (natural reason) as he led Dante through four moments of conversion. On the edge of the Earthly Paradise, Beatrice (revelation) mediates his second conversion, at least the first three moments of it. The fourth, the new life which follows upon Dante's response to grace, now comprises the first thirty cantos of the _Paradiso_. In this new life, parallel to the new life of penance in the _Purgatorio_, Dante is led by Beatrice on an ascent through the nine heavens to the final goal of the _Commedia_, the abode of God in the Empyrean.

The book begins with a clear statement of Dante's goal, Beatrice's mediation, and Dante's movement beyond humanity by means of grace.

> Beatrice tutta nell'eterne rote
>   fissa con le occhi stava; ed io in lei
>   le luci fissi, di là sú remote.
> Nel suo aspetto tal dentro me fei,
>   qual si fè Glauco nel gustar dell'erba
>   che 'l fè consorte in mar delli altri Dei.
> Transumanar significar per verba
>   non si porìa; però l'essemplo basti
>   a cui experienza grazia serba.

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[1] "Epistola X," in _Dantis Alagherii Epistolae_, trans. Paget Toynbee (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 202.

> Beatrice stood with her eyes fixed only on the eternal wheels, and on her I fixed mine, withdrawn from above. At her aspect I was changed within, as was Glaucus when he tasted of the herb that made him one among the other gods in the sea. The passing beyond humanity cannot be set forth in words; let the example suffice, therefore, for him to whom grace reserves the experience. (1:64-72)

This "transumanar" or passing beyond humanity is granted to Dante for a special reason, one which St. James spells out much later and which finally adds up to Dante's own reason to Can Grande: to change people.

> Poi che par grazia vuol che tu t'affronti
>   lo nostro imperadore, anzi la morte,
>   nell'aula più secreta co' suoi conti,
> sì che, veduto il ver di questa corte,
>   la spene che là giù bene innamora
>   in te ed in altrui de ciò conforte,
> dì quel ch'ell'è, e come se ne 'nfiora
>   la mente tua, e dì onde a te venne.

> Since our Emperor, of His grace, wills that thou shouldst come before thy death face to face with His nobles in the inner chamber, so that, having seen the truth of this court, thou mayst with that strengthen in thyself and others the hope that begets true love below, say what it is and how it blossoms in thy mind, and say whence it came to thee. (25:40-47)

Thus the bulk of the *Paradiso* becomes the first moment of a new conversion, a moment not of wandering as it had been in the *Inferno* nor of a pilgrimage of penance as in the *Purgatorio*, but of a gradual blossoming of love in his mind.

This blossoming metaphor, however, is taken up only at the end of the *Paradiso*. In the meantime, Dante is still the pilgrim guided by Beatrice from sphere to sphere. And the metaphor is still that of conversion and turning. Beatrice even stresses that because of his free will Dante can yet turn away from God and back to things of earth.

> Vero è che come forma non s'accorda
>   molte fiate all' intenzion dell'arte,
>   perch'a risponder la materia è sorda;
> così da questo corso si diparte
>   talor la creatura, c' ha podere
>   di piegar, così pinta, in altra parte;
> e sì come veder si può cadere
>   foco di nube, sì l' impeto primo
>   s'atterra, torto da falso piacere.

> It is true that, as a shape often does not accord with the art's intention because the material is deaf and unresponsive, so sometimes the creature, having the power, thus impelled, to turn aside another way, deviates from this course, and, as fire may be seen to fall from a cloud, so the primal impulse, diverted by false pleasure, is turning to the earth. (1:127-35)

At this point in Dante's journey, a turning aside is not a turning back to sin but a turning from the better way to the merely good. Thus Constance is in the lowest sphere, that of the moon, for having been inconstant in her vows.

> Ma poi che pur al mondo fu rivolta
>   contra suo grado e contra buona usanza,
>   non fu dal vel del cor già mai disciolta.

> But even after she was turned back to the world against her will and against right custom she was never loosed from the veil on the heart. (3:115-17)

Of course, there is no possibility in Paradise for repentance of former faults or inconstancy. Rather, since after Lethe all memory of sin has been washed away, repentance is transformed into praise. Folco unfolds this truth:

> Non però qui si pente, ma si ride,
>   non della colpa, ch'a mente non torna,
>   ma del valor ch'ordinò e provide.
> Qui si rimira nell'arte ch'adorna
>   cotanto effetto, e discernesi 'l bene
>   per che 'l mondo di su quel di giù torna.
>
> Yet here we do not repent; nay, we smile, not for our fault, which does not come back to mind, but for the Power which ordained and foresaw. Here we contemplate the art that makes beautiful the great result, and discern the good for which the world above wheels about the world below. (9:103-8)

As guide, Beatrice is the one for Dante "che sì scorge / di bene in meglio"—who leads from good to better—and thus her mediating role at first is indispensable. (10:37-38) But as Dante progresses from sphere to sphere, Beatrice begins to withdraw from her mediating role. She is needed less and less. Dante continues to look to her eyes for the mirrored light of Paradise, but she warns him: "Volgiti ed ascolta; / chè non pur ne' miei occhi è paradiso"—Turn and listen, for not only in my eyes is Paradies. (18:20-21)

Dante continues to return his gaze to Beatrice's eyes, for indeed they do reflect Paradise to him. What is more, Beatrice is becoming more and more beautiful as they ascend.[1] Thus while Beatrice is slowly weaning him away from her mediation, he looks to her with ever greater fervor.

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[1] John D. Sinclair notes:
"One of Dante's most significant and beautiful

> Già eran li occhi miei rifissi al volto
>   della mia donna, e l'animo con essi,
>   e da ogni altro intento s'era tolto.
> E quella non ridea; ma 'S' io ridessi'
>   mi cominciò 'tu ti faresti quale
>   fu Semelè quado di cener fessi;
> chè la bellezza mia, che per le scale
>   dell'etterno palazzo più s'accende,
>   com' hai veduto, quanto più si sale,
> se non si temperasse, tanto splende,
>   che 'l tuo mortal podere, al suo fulgore,
>   sarebbe fronda che trono scoscende.'

> Already my eyes were fixed again on the face of my Lady, and with them my mind, which was withdrawn from every other thought; and she did not smile, but 'Were I to smile' she began to me 'thou wouldst become like Semele when she was turned to ashes; for my beauty, which thou hast seen kindle more the higher we climb by the stairs of the eternal palace, is so shining that if it were not tempered thy mortal powers in its blaze would be as a branch split by a thunderbolt.' (21:1-12)

Beatrice follows this by a command to look away from her to a new vision. Later she will do the same; Dante turning to her, she turning him away to see for himself:

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inventions in the Paradiso is that each ascent from height to greater height is marked by the increasing beauty of Beatrice in his eyes; the truth of God, more known, becomes always more glorious. It is an allegorical device, a poet's version of justification by faith." Sinclair, 3:128.

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> Oppresso di stupore, alla mia guida
>   mi volsi, come parvol che ricorre
>   sempre colà dove più si confida;
> e quella, come madre che soccorre
>   subito al figlio palido e anelo
>   con la sua voce, che 'l suol ben disporre,
> mi disse:
> . . . . .
> 'Ma rivolgiti omai inverso altrui;
>   ch'assai illustri spiriti vedrai,
>   se com' io dico l'aspetto redui.'
>
> Overwhelmed with amazement, I turned to my guide like a child that runs back always to the place where it has most confidence; and she, like a mother who quickly comforts her pale and breathless boy with the voice that has often reassured him, said to me: . . . 'But turn now to the others, for thou shalt see many illustrious spirits if thou direct thy sight as I say.' (22:1-7, 19-21)

Finally, as Dante approaches his final conversion to mysticism, there comes a time when even Beatrice's mediation is not enough. Dante attempts to look into the depths of the light that is St. John the Evangelist when suddenly he finds himself blinded:

> Ahi quanto nella mente mi commossi,
>   quando me volsi per veder Beatrice,
>   per non poter veder, ben che io fossi
> presso di lei, e nel mondo felice!
>
> Ah, how troubled in mind I was when I turned to see Beatrice, not to be able to see her, though I was by her side and in the happy world. (25:136-39)

Sightless and alone, he must undergo St. John's examination of his charity. He answers in terms of the conversion he has undergone, the turning of his heart from false loves to the true love of God:

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> Tutti quei morsi
> che posson far lo cor volgere a Dio,
> alla mia caritate son concorsi;
> chè l'essere del mondo e l'esser mio,
> la morte ch'el sostenne perch' io viva,
> e quel che spera ogni fedel com' io,
> con la predetta conoscenza viva,
> tratto m' hanno del mar dell'amor torto,
> e del diritto m' han posto alla riva.

> All those teeth with power enough to turn the heart of any man to God have joined in my heart, turning it to Love, The existence of the world, and my own, too; the death He took on Himself that I might live; and what all believers hope for as I do—these and the living knowledge mentioned before have saved me from the ocean of false love and placed me by the true, safe on the shore. (26:55-63)

This turning of Dante's heart to Love nears completion when he ascends at last to the Empyrean. Suddenly he says, "io compresi / me sormontar di sopr'a mia virtute"—I was conscious of rising beyond my own powers. (30:56-57) He has a vision of "lume in forma di rivera"—light in the form of a river. (61) Beatrice tells him that he must drink of it with his eyes; an action which parallels his washing before climbing the Mount of Purgatory and both his passing through the river Lethe and his drinking of the river Eunoë before entering the Earthly Paradise. Dante is clearly on the threshold of a new conversion.

Dante looks up from drinking in the river of light and suddenly sees with new eyes.[1] What he sees—still at a distance—is the goal of his whole pilgrimage: the Celestial Rose.

> E quasi peregrim che se recrea
>   nel tempio del suo voto riguardando
>   e spera già ridir com'ello stea,
> su per la viva luce passeggiando,
>   menava io li occhi per li gradi,
>   mo su, mo giù, e mo recirculando.

> And like a pilgrim who is refreshed in the temple of his vow as he looks around it and hopes some time to tell of it again, so, taking my way up through the living light, I carried my eyes through the ranks, now up, now down, and now looking around again. (31:43-48)

Dante turns quickly to question Beatrice; but just as before he had suddenly discovered Virgil gone at the moment of a quantum leap in his religious experience, so now he discovers that Beatrice has disappeared to be replaced by a new mediator of grace:

> e volgeami con voglia riaccesa
>   per domandar la mia donna di cose
>   di che la mente mia era sospesa.
> Uno intendea, e altro me rispose:
>   credea veder Beatrice, e vidi un sene
>   vestito con le genti gloriose.

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[1] Sinclair makes an observation apropos of Dante's conversion:

> "Before that he was for a moment blinded by the sudden light that 'shone round about me.' The incident may well have been suggested by St. Paul's experience on the Damascus road when he was blinded by a light from heaven and in his blindness gained a new enlightenment; and it is perhaps significant that the unusual word circunfulgere, to shine round about, which is used here, occurs, in its Latin form, in each of the three Vulgate accounts of Paul's vision." Ibid., p. 442.

> And I turned with new-kindled eagerness to question my Lady of things on which my mind was in suspense. One thing I intended, and another encountered me: I thought to see Beatrice, and I saw an old man, clothed like that glorious company. (55-60)

The old man is Bernard; he will mediate what Thomas had called the first or highest of the three turnings to God: "The first is by the perfect love of God; this belongs to the creature enjoying the possession of God; and for such conversion, consumate grace is required."[1] Beatrice, as Dante's guide and mediator of sanctifying grace, has led him as far as she could. Returned now to her place within the Celestial Rose, Dante utters a prayer to her which commemorates her essential role in his pilgrimage.

> 'O donna in cui la mia speranza vige,
>   e che soffristi per la mia salute
>   in inferno lasciar le tue vestige,
> di tante cose quant' i' ho vedute,
>   dal tuo podere e dalla tua bontate
>   riconosco la grazia e la virtute.
> Tu m' hai di servo tratto a libertate
>   per tutte quelle vie, per tutt' i modi
>   che di ciò fare avei la potestate.
> La tua magnificenza in me custodi,
>   sì che l'anima mia, che fatt' hai sana,
>   piacente a te dal corpo si disnodi.

> O Lady in whom my hope has its strength and who didst bear for my salvation to leave thy footprints in Hell, of all the things that I have seen I acknowledge the grace and the virtue to be from thy power and from thy goodness. It is thou who hast drawn me from bondage into liberty by all

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[1] *Summa theologica* I, 62, 2.

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> those ways, by every means for it that was in thy power. Preserve in me thy great bounty, so that my spirit, which thou hast made whole, may be loosed from the body well-pleasing to thee. (79-90)

Bernard indicates at once what is necessary "Acciò che tu assommi / perfettamente . . . il tuo commino"—in order that thou mayst complete thy journey to the very end. (94-95) Dante must receive grace from the Queen of Heaven. It is Mary who now is revealed as the mediator of grace par excellence because of her unique relationship with Christ.

> Riguarda omai nella facci che a Christo
> più si somiglia, chè la sua chiarezza
> sola ti può disporre a veder Christo.'
>
> Look now on the face that most resembles Christ, for only its brightness can fit thee to see Christ. (32:85-87)

Bernard insists upon the necessity of prayer to Mary for grace, hinting that without it Dante is still in danger of turning back.

> Veramente, ne forse tu t'arretri
> movendo l'ali tue, credendo oltrarti,
> orando grazia conven che s' impetri,
> grazia da quella che puote aiutarti;
> e tu mi seguirai con l'affezione,
> sì che dal dicer mio lo cor non parti.
>
> But lest perchance thou fall back, beating thy wings and thinking to advance, grace must be gained by prayer, grace from her who has power to help thee; and do thou follow me with thy love so that thy heart may not separate from my words. (145-50)

And so Bernard becomes Dante's spiritual teacher, directing him to imitate in his heart a long prayer to

Mary.[1] In the prayer Bernard reminds Mary of the vast scope of Dante's journey and the distance he has yet to go:

> Or questi, che dall' infima lacuna
>   dell'universo infin qui ha vedute
>   le vite spiritali ad una ad una,
> supplica a te, per grazia, di virtute
>   tanto, che possa con li occhi levarsi
>   più alto verso l'ultima salute.

> This man, who from the nethermost pit of the universe to here has seen one by one the lives of the spirits, now begs of thee by thy grace for such power that with his eyes he may rise still higher towards the last salvation. (33:22-27)

Then in a most remarkable passage, Bernard joins his own mediating prayer with the prayers of Beatrice and a vast assembly of the blessed. Sinclair comments that this is "Dante's final demonstration of the vast fellowship of aspiration and intercession which is the life of the saints in heaven and earth and which avails for a single soul."[2]

> E io, che mai per mio veder non arsi
>   più ch' i' fo per lo suo, tutti miei preghi
>   ti porgo, e priego che non sieno scarsi,
> perchè tu ogni nube li disleghi
>   di sua mortalità co' prieghi tuoi,
>   sì che 'l sommo piacer li si dispieghi.

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[1] Sinclair quotes F. M. Powicke's statement that "St. Bernard, probably more than any other great teacher of the Christian society, influenced the moral and spiritual life of Dante." Sinclair, p. 458.

[2] Ibid., p. 488.

> Anchor ti priego, Regina, che puoi
>   ciò che tu vuoli, che conservi sani,
>   dopo tanto veder, li affetti suoi.
> Vinca tua guardia i movimenti umani:
>   vedi Beatrice con quanti beati
>   per li miei preghi ti chiudon le mani!
>
> And I, who never burned for my own vision more than I do for his, offer to thee all my prayers, and pray that they come not short, that by thy prayers thou wilt disperse for him every cloud of his mortality so that the supreme joy may be disclosed to him. This too I pray of thee, Queen, who canst what thou wilt, that thou keep his affections pure after so great a vision. Let thy guardianship control his human impulses. See Beatrice and so many of the blest who clasp their hands for my prayers. (28-39)

This is the moment of mediating grace drawing Dante onward to his final conversion. It is now up to Dante; he may respond or not. Bernard turns to him to signal how he should respond, but Dante has anticipated him:

> Bernardo m'accennava e sorridea
>   perch' io guardassi suso; ma io era
>   già per me stesso tal qual ei volea.
>
> Bernard signed to me with a smile to look upward, but already of myself I was doing what he wished. (49-51)

Dante has responded to grace before in the Commedia: first to the prevenient grace offered by Virgil, then to the sanctifying grace by Beatrice. But each time it was made clear that he could still turn back, still fall away into a former way of life. But here in the response to the blinding light, Dante senses that it is now impossible to turn away.

> Io credo, per l'acume ch' io soffersi
>   del vivo raggio, ch' i' sarei smarrito,
>   se li occhi miei da lui fossero aversi.
> . . . .
> A quella luce cotal si diventa,
>   che volgersi da lei per altro aspetto
>   è impossibil che mai si consenta.

> I think, from the keenness I endured of the living ray, that I would have been dazzled if my eyes had been turned from it. . . . At that light one becomes such that it is impossible for him ever to consent that he should turn from it to another sight. (76-78; 100-3)

In fact, it becomes increasingly evident that in this final conversion Dante has been lifted into a state of perpetual conversion.

> Non perchè più ch' un semplice sembiante
>   fosse nel vivo lume ch' io mirava,
>   che tal è sempre qual s'era davante;
> ma per la vista che s'avvalorava
>   in me guardando, una sola parvenza,
>   mutandom' io, a me si travagliava.

> Not because that Living Radiance bore more than one semblance, for it is unchanging and is forever as it was before; rather, as I grew worthier to see, the more I looked, the more unchanging semblance appeared to change with every change in me. (109-14)

Dante describes himself as ever turning and changing in tune with the object of his contemplation. This object is now revealed as the Trinity itself. Here at last there is no more need for mediation. Dante has found the new life of his final conversion in the unmediated contemplation of the triune God. This new life, as described by Dante, is in point by point agreement with the common definition of mysticism: "From a theological point of view, mysticism may be regarded as consciousness of the experience of uncreated grace as revelation and self-communication of the triune God."[1] Thus the Paradiso, and the Commedia itself, ends with Dante in the perfect harmony of the ultimate conversion.

> All'alta fantasia qui mancò possa;
>   ma già volgeva il mio disio e 'l velle,
>   sì come rota ch' igualmente è mossa,
> l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.
>
> Here my powers rest from their high fantasy,
> but already I could feel my being turned—
> instinct and intellect balanced equally as
> in a wheel whose motion nothing jars—by
> the Love that moves the Sun and the other
> stars. (142-43)

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter on conversion in Dante's two major literary works, we have divided our focus between two conversion structures. The first was the threefold hierarchy of conversions which was outlined by Thomas Aquinas and embodied in poetic narrative by Dante. Thus after an abortive conversion in the opening canto of the Commedia—Dante attempting to climb the hill of repentance without the aid of grace—the first conversion extends through all of the Inferno and the bulk of the Purgatorio up to canto 30. The second conversion commences with the appearance of Beatrice and extends through the Paradiso until her withdrawal in canto 31. The third conversion in the hierarchy fills the last three cantos of the work.

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[1] Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology, 1969 ed., s.v. "Mysticism," by Heribert Fischer.

Our focus likewise returned to the conversion structure we noted in the first two chapters of this study, that is, the four moments of conversion. For in Dante, as in the conversion accounts of the Old and New Testaments and Augustine's Confessions, these four moments form a recurrent structure of imagery as well as of narration. Thus Dante's wandering in the dark wood, his later pilgrimages through the circles of Hell, the ledges of Purgatory, and the spheres of Heaven echo the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert, their exile in Babylonia, Saul's persecution of the Christians, and Augustine's intellectual convolutions.

In the second moment of conversion, the call of grace which comes to the wanderer-pilgrim, not only does Dante echo biblical events, but also adds his own artistic insights. One of these is centering the call of grace on a human God-bearer in the person of Beatrice. This realization in itself assures Dante a place within the tradition of conversion. Equally significant is his insistence upon the role of natural wisdom in the person of Virgil for leading the sinner to repentance. Only when we reflect upon John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress in the next chapter will we begin to appreciate the secular encounter which Dante offers in his portrayal of Virgil's guidance.

Within the third moment, man's response to the call of grace, Dante adds an emphasis which was not included in previous imaginative literature, that is, his emphasis on the purgative process necessary for total conversion. This, of course, was implicit even in Old Testament accounts, but Dante's detailed narration of the process in the *Purgatorio* has stamped it indelibly on the face of western literature, not to mention the western imagination.

Finally, in the fourth moment, Dante shows the new life of man as initially a life of purgative quest for wholeness, then as a life of wholeness itself, and ultimately as a life of mystical harmony with the triune God. In this fourth moment, Dante attempts to do what had never been done before in literature: to describe the new man, new life, new creation which Paul had said was the result of conversion and which the Promised Land and the New Jerusalem symbolized for the Israelites.

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CHAPTER IV

JOHN BUNYAN'S GRACE ABOUNDING AND PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

Dante found in the medieval model of reality a ready-made apparatus of mediators between man and God. John Bunyan found nothing of the sort. The Reformation had changed everything and man's relationship with God was no longer mediated, we might even say "softened," by Mary, angels, or saints. In the hard reality of the rectified theology, man confronted an awesome and, as often as not, wrathful God: he was, as Jonathan Edwards would have it, a "sinner in the hands of an angry God."

Thus, if Dante could be called the poet of mediated conversion, Bunyan is the allegorizer of unmediated. We cannot look for a Beatrice or a Virgil or a Bernard to bring God's grace to the pilgrim. God's grace and his justification (a word we had no occasion to use in terms of Dante's theology) will come to man through the direct revelation of the Bible.

But though Dante and Bunyan are dissimilar in many more ways than we have mentioned, yet at the very crossroads where we encounter them in this study—that

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is, in the structures of conversion which inform their works—we find them immediately similar. Both began with works which treated their conversions in an autobiographical manner (Vita nuova and Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners) followed by their masterpieces which projected conversion into vast imaginative landscapes (the Divine Comedy and Pilgrim's Progress). Even these latter titles reveal the similarities between Dante and Bunyan. Can anyone deny that the Divine Comedy is a progress or Pilgrim's Progress a comedy?

Dr. Johnson seems to be the first critic to compare Bunyan and Dante. Speaking of Pilgrim's Progress, he says: "It is remarkable that it begins very much like the poem of Dante; yet there was no translation of Dante when Bunyan wrote."[1] We will follow Johnson's lead and attempt to discover other similarities—and differences—that exist between Dante and Bunyan. Our first task in this chapter, however, is not to compare these two men, but rather to look at Bunyan and his expression of conversion. To carry out this task we will first consider the structure of conversion which emerges from his autobiographical account in Grace Abounding. Then we will observe his allegorical rendering of conversion in Pilgrim's

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[1] Boswell's Life of Johnson, ed. G. B. Hill, revised L. F. Powell, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), 2:238.

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Progress. Finally we will conclude by comparing and contrasting Bunyan's reformation model of conversion with Dante's medieval model.

Grace Abounding

Bunyan begins his life-account with a description of his early life before conversion. He sums up his state thus:

> As for my own natural life, for the time that I was without God in the world, it was indeed according to the course of this world, and the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Eph. 2. 2, 3. it was my delight to be taken captive by the Devil at his will, 2 Tim. 2. 26. being filled with all unrighteousness; the which did also so strongly work, and put forth itself, both in my heart and life, and that from a childe, that I had but few Equals, (especially considering my years, which were tender, being few) both for cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming the holy Name of God. (5-6)[1]

Noticeable at once is Bunyan's penchant for coordinating the events from his life with scriptural texts. This technique tends so to generalize his experience that every moment in his conversion echoes biblical conversion accounts. At the same time this technique leads to a question about Bunyan's reliability as narrator of his own conversion; that is, How much of his narrative can be taken as a literal account of his lived experience, how much a stylistic or imaginative treatment according to themes and structures found elsewhere in biblical and Puritan literature? But this is a question we must hold in suspension until we have examined the full curve of his presentation.

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[1] Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, ed. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962). All quotations will be numbered in the text according to this edition.

Bunyan says his early life besides being "filled with all unrighteousness" in his actions also had certain inner manifestations:

> Yea, so setled and rooted was I in these things, that they became as a second Nature to me; the which, as I also have with soberness considered since, did so offend the Lord, that even in my childhood he did scare and affright me with fearful dreams, and did terrifie me with dreadful visions. For often, after I had spent this and the other day in sin, I have in my bed been greatly afflicted, while asleep, with the apprehensions of Devils, and wicked spirits, who still, as I then thought, laboured to draw me away with them; of which I could never be rid. (6)

Such obviously psychological symptoms, if taken literally, could and did readily end up as case studies for psychologists of religion such as William James, James B. Pratt, and E. D. Starbuck. Again we must defer until later the question of how literally Bunyan's narrative should be taken.

What emerges from Bunyan's extensive account of his early life is a picture of the soul in the first moment of conversion. It is a time of sin, unbelief, wandering, and hopeless seeking for deliverance. Bunyan-the-narrator, as Augustine had before him, looks back upon this period in his life and marvels that despite all his

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sins God preserved him. He tells of three times when God in his mercy saved him from death by drowning, snake bite, and musket bullet. (7-8)[1]

When he marries, his wife brings with her a strong faith and two books, The Plaine Mans Path-way to Heaven by Arthur Dent (a dialogic account of the process of conversion) and The Practice of Piety by Lewis Bayly. These books affect a change in his life, an abortive- or pseudo-conversion such as we shall see later in the life of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus:

> Wherefore these books, . . . though they did not reach my heart to awaken it about my sad and sinful state, yet they did beget within me some desires to Religion: so that, because I knew no better, I fell in very eagerly with the Religion of the times, to wit, to go to Church twice a day, and that too with the foremost, and there should very devoutly both say and sing as others did; yet retaining my wicked life: but withal, I was so overrun with the spirit of superstition, that I adored, and that with great devotion, even all things, (both the

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[1] Bunyan comments in Saved by Grace on this phenomenon, connected closely to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, though he is careful to draw no such connection in Grace Abounding:

> "How many deaths some have been delivered from and saved out of before conversion! Some have fallen into rivers, some into wells, some into the sea, some into the hands of men; yea they have been justly arraigned and condemned, as the thief upon the cross, but must not die before they have been converted." The Works of John Bunyan, ed. George Offor, 3 vols. (London: Blackie and Son, 1861-62), 1:338.

> High-place, Priest, Clerk, Vestments, Service, and what else) belonging to the Church; counting all things holy that were therein contained; and especially the Priest and Clerk most happy, and without doubt greatly blessed, because they were the Servants, as I then thought, of God, and were principal in the holy Temple, to do his work therein. (8-9)

From his vantage as a mature convert years later, Bunyan-the-narrator comments on his youthful delusions with such phrases as "because I knew no better" and "as I then thought." The thought that the priest was somehow a mediator between his soul and God is rejected. Mediation would have to be found elsewhere:

> But all this while, I was not sensible of the danger and evil of sin; I was kept from considering that sin would damn me, what Religion soever I followed, unless I was found in Christ: nay, I never thought of him, nor whether there was one or no. Thus man, while blind, doth wander, but wearieth himself with vanity: for he knoweth not the way to the City of God, Eccles. 10. 15. (9)

Here, in a single passage, Bunyan sums up the whole structure which his eventual conversion must follow. What we have been calling the first moment is found in the words "Thus man, while blind, doth wander, but wearieth himself with vanity"; the second moment and the grace of its awakening to sin in the words "I was kept from considering that sin would damn me, what Religion soever I followed"; the third in "unless I was found in Christ"; and the fourth, here expressed negatively in its contrary, in the clause "for he knoweth not the way to the

City of God."

Immediately thereafter Bunyan tells of an episode reminiscent of Augustine's hearing the sermon of Ambrose. After attending a sermon treating "of the Sabbath day, and of the evil of breaking that, either with labour, sports, or otherwise," he nevertheless engages in a sabbath game of Cat. In the midst of the game, he says

> . . . a voice did suddenly dart from Heaven into my Soul, which said, Wilt thou leave thy sins, and go to Heaven? or have thy sins, and go to Hell? At this I was put to an exceeding maze; wherefore, leaving my Cat upon the ground, I looked up to Heaven, and was as if I had with the eyes of my understanding, seen the Lord Jesus looking down upon me, as being very hotly displeased with me, and as if he did severely threaten me with some grievous punishment for these, and other my ungodly practices. (10)

In a flash as decisive as the one that struck Saul on the road to Damascus, Bunyan encounters the Lord Jesus who can either condemn him for his sins or mediate his salvation. The next sixty pages or so of the book narrate the tumultuous second moment of Bunyan's conversion. It is an amazing account of how he oscillates between hope and despair according to the various scripture texts which fall upon his tortured soul. Where earlier his wanderings had been aimless, now they become purposeful with the purpose of the word of God. Thomas Sherman would later attempt a correction of Pilgrim's Progress because of what he calls "a too

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brief passing over the methods of Divine Goodness in the convincing, converting, and reconciling of sinners to himself."[1] This criticism could never be applied to Grace Abounding, the bulk of which is devoted to precisely this moment of conversion.

His first oscillation is to another apparent conversion, mistaken because (as for Stephen Dedalus) it is only external:

> But, I say, my Neighbours were amazed at this my great Conversion, from prodigious profaneness, to something like a moral life; and, truly, so they well might; for this my Conversion was as great, as for Tom of Bethlem to become a sober man. Now therefore, they began to praise, to commend, and to speak well of me, both to my face, and behind my back. Now, I was, as they said, become godly; now, I was become a right honest man. But Oh! when I understood that these were their words and opinions of me, it pleased me mighty well. For though, as yet, I was nothing but a poor painted Hypocrite, yet I loved to be talked of as one that was truly Godly. I was proud of my Godliness; and, I did all I did, either to be seen of, or to be well spoken of, by men: well, this I say, continued for about a twelve-month or more. (13)

Clearly only the shell of a conversion, but not just because it is external—every true conversion has its outer manifestations. It is a pseudo-conversion because there is no evidence of the grace or call of Christ impelling it. The Pauline formula, "through Christ," is absent.

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[1] In the Author's Apology, The Second Part of the Pilgrims Progress, From This present World of Wickedness and Misery, to An Eternity of Holiness and Felicity. Exactly Described under the Similitude of a Dream, (London: Printed by T. H. over against the Poultry, 1682), quoted in William York Tindall, John Bunyan: Mechanick Preacher (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), p. 235.

This becomes clear to Bunyan a year later as he is passing through Bedford about his calling as tinker. He sees "three or four poor women sitting at a door in the Sun" and stops to listen to them. What they have to say goes right to the heart of his delusions,

> for their talk was about a new birth, the work of God on their hearts, also how they were convinced of their miserable state by nature: they talked how God had visited their souls with his love in the Lord Jesus, and with what words and promises they had been refreshed, comforted, and supported against the temptations of the Devil; moreover, they reasoned of the suggestions and temptations of Satan in particular, and told to each other by which they had been afflicted, and how they were borne up under his assaults: they also discoursed of their own wretchedness of heart, of their unbelief, and did contemn, slight, and abhor their own righteousness, as filthy and insufficient to do them any good. (14)

At this, Bunyan realizes that his condition was critical, "for I saw that in all my thoughts about Religion and Salvation, the New birth did never enter into my mind, neither knew I the comfort of the Word and Promise, nor the deceitfulness and treachery of my own wicked heart." (15) He lacks the grace of the second moment both in its negative effect of revealing his sinfulness and in its positive effect of revealing Christ's word and promise. This negative effect is one we have seen before in Paul and the prophets; it became central to the Calvinistic and Puritan economy of salvation. It is the first phase of the second moment of conversion, often the most prolonged period chronologically in the whole process. There was no question of a person coming to a realization of sinfulness without grace, but once this grace was given the time of anguish, self-examination, and prayer before one became convinced of his justification could last several years. But in all the conversion accounts of the seventeenth century, none lasted as long nor was as harrowing as Bunyan's own.[1]

The reason for the long period of torment was Bunyan's Puritan need for certainty that he was called by Christ and thus was one of the elect. On the other hand, perhaps he had been called but missed the day of grace: "Here I began to find my Soul to be assaulted with fresh doubts about my future happiness, especially with such as these, Whether I was elected; but how if the day of grace should now be past and gone?" (20)

The cause and effect relationship between call and conversion ("None but those who are effectually called, inherit the Kingdom of Heaven") is so clear to him that he pleads for the call to come:

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[1] See Dean Ebner, Autobiography in Seventeenth-Century England (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp. 22-71.

> I cannot now express with what longings and breakings in my Soul, I cryed to Christ to call me. Thus I continued for a time all on a flame to be converted to Jesus Christ, and did also see at that day such glory in a converted state, that I could not be contented without a share therein. Gold! could it have been gotten for Gold, what could I have given for it! had I had a whole world, it had all gone ten thousand times over, for this, that my Soul might have been in a converted state. (24)

Bunyan realizes all the time, however, the folly of trying to effect conversion by his own means. Neither prayers nor gold can be of any use, nor any Arian or Arminian doctrines of man's redemption. The text from scripture which tormented him the most was one that insisted on the ineffectualness of man's attempts to gain repentance:

> Or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his Birth-right; for you know how that afterwards when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears, Heb. 12. 16, 17. (43)

In the battle of scripture texts which repeatedly lifted him up only to pitch him down (reminiscent of Augustine's temptations), this became the one to bring him almost to despair. Completely helpless, he could only wait for Christ's call, hoping against hope that he had not somehow sold his birth-right.

As he waited, however, his knowledge of Calvinistic theology was less a comfort than a torment, since it emphasized his distance from the third moment of perfect righteousness in Christ:

> But I observe, though I was such a great sinner before conversion, yet God never much charged the guilt of the sins of my Ignorance upon me, only he shewed me I was lost if I had not Christ because I had been a sinner. I saw that I wanted a perfect righteousness to present me without fault before God and that this righteousness was nowhere to be found but in the person of Jesus Christ. (27)

Bunyan knew that Christ was his only hope, his only shield from a just and wrathful God. But his reading of scripture convinced him that he, like Esau, had committed the unforgiveable sin, had sold Jesus: "You have parted with Jesus! you have sold your Saviour!" (51) But still the hope of God's grace alternated with the fear of judgment. The following passage must be quoted in full for an appreciation of the conflict in Bunyan's soul, as well as an appreciation of the conversion imagery which Bunyan-the-narrator uses to portray the rhythm of his experience:

> Now I should find my minde to flee from God, as from the face of a dreadful Judge; yet this was my torment, I could not escape his hand. ('It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,' Heb. 10.). But blessed be his grace, that scripture, in these flying fits would call as running after me, 'I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and, as a cloud thy sins: Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee,' Isa. 44. 22. This, I say, would come in upon my mind, when I was fleeing from the face of God; for I did flee from his face, that is, my mind and spirit fled before him; by reason of his highness, I could not endure; then would the

> text cry, 'Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.' Indeed, this would make me make a little stop, and, as it were, look over my shoulder behind me, to see if I could discern that the God of grace did follow me with a pardon in his hand, but I could no sooner do that, but all would be clouded and darkened again by that sentence, 'For you know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.' Wherefore I could not return, but fled, though at sometimes it cried 'Return, return,' as if it did hollow after me: But I feared to close in therewith, lest it should not come from God, for that other, as I said was still sounding in my conscience, 'For you know that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected,' etc. (52)

Bunyan's second moment becomes a flight from the face of God interrupted occasionally by texts calling for a "return" or—toward the conclusion of his flight—with the assurance: "My Grace is sufficient." (64-65) But his Puritan fundamentalism, with its literal reading of the scriptures, remains an obstacle. He knows that "I should begin to repent," but then remembers:

> How many Scriptures are there against me? there is but three or four, and cannot God miss them, and save me for all of them? Sometimes again I should think, O if it were not for these three or four words, now how might I be comforted! and I could hardly forbear at some times, but to wish them out of the Book. (66)

He even imagines all the writers of the scriptures scorning and deriding him as if to say, "All our words are truth, one of as much force as another; it is not we that have cut you off, but you have cast away your-

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self." (66)

His tormented movement between hope and fear finally comes to an end after two years—if we can take the chronology of Grace Abounding literally—when suddenly a sentence falls upon his soul,

> 'Thy righteousness is in Heaven'; and methought withall, I saw with the eyes of my Soul Jesus Christ at Gods right hand, there, I say, as my Righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was a doing, God could not say of me, 'He wants my Righteousness,' for that was just before him. (72)

Bunyan finds his mediator and his righteousness in Christ; a righteousness, that is, "imputed" by Christ in accordance with Reformation theology.

His response to this grace of righteousness, the third moment of conversion, seems involuntary. Arthur Dent in The Plaine Mans Path-way to Heaven had given this moment a more active cast with the exhortation

> Apply Christ, apply his merits, apply the promises to your selfe, and to your owne conscience: so shall they doe you good and bring great comfort to your soule. . . . You must therefore apply Christ, and all the promises of the Gospel, to your selfe by faith, and stand fully perswaded, that whatsoever he hath done upon the Crosse, he hath done for you particularly.[1]

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[1] The Plaine Mans Path-way to Heaven: Wherein every man may cleerely see, whether he shall be saved or damned. Set forth Dialogue-wise, for the better understanding of the simple, 9th impression (London: Printed for Edw. Bishop, 1607; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 17837, n.d.), p. 380.

Bunyan's response, however, contains just such an application of Christ's merits without using Dent's dynamic rhetoric. The immediate effects in Bunyan's life, on the other hand, are indeed dynamic and radical:

> Now did my chains fall off my Legs indeed. I was loosed from my affliction and irons, my temptations also fled away: so that from that time those dreadful Scriptures of God left off to trouble me; now went I also home rejoycing, for the grace and love of God. (72)

Earlier we noted how Paul had distinguished among the prepositional phrases "through Christ" (second moment) and "into Christ" (third moment) and "in Christ and with Christ" (fourth moment). Bunyan, as we might have predicted, is less precise with his grammar. He never uses the formula "into Christ" though that is surely the content of the third moment of his conversion as he moves under the cloak of Christ's righteousness. But since free will was effectively denied in the Calvinist-Puritan economy, Bunyan seems to avoid the use of active verbs to describe his turning to Christ. And thus where the second moment of Christ's activity of convincing, converting, and reconciling extended over sixty pages of the book, the moment of response or recognition or acceptance or turning covers less than one.

Bunyan immediately moves into an account of the fourth moment of his new life, and here the prepositions "with and in Christ" are evident:

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> . . . Here therefore I lived, for some time, very sweetly at peace with God thorow Christ. . . . O I saw my Gold was in my Trunk at home! In Christ my Lord and Saviour! Now Christ was all my Wisdom, all my Righteousness, all my Sanctification, and all my Redemption.
>
> Further, The Lord did also lead me into the mystery of Union with this Son of God, that I was joyned to him, that I was flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone, and now was that a sweet word to me in Ephes. 5.3. By this also was my faith in him, as my Righteousness, the more confirmed to me. (73)

Here too he mentions for the first time the doctrine of election as that which sums up the entire foregoing process of conversion: "Now I saw Christ Jesus was looked on of God, and should also be looked on by us as that common or publick person, in whom all the whole Body of his Elect are always to be considered and reckoned." (73)

After reaching this point of equilibrium after such a long and arduous struggle, Bunyan pauses in his narrative to sum up his progress:

> Having thus in few words given you a taste of the sorrow and affliction that my Soul went under, by the guilt and terror that this my wicked thought did lay me under; and having given you also a touch of my deliverance therefrom, and of the sweet and blessed comfort that I met with afterwards, (which comfort dwelt about a twelve-month with my heart, to my unspeakable admiration) I will now (God willing) before I proceed any further, give you in a word or two, what, as I conceive, was the cause of this Temptation; and also after that, what advantage at the last it became unto my Soul. (74)

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This paragraph signals the end of Bunyan's account of conversion. As he promises, he begins a lengthy explanation of the temptations which assailed him in the second moment, concluding with one of his most memorable statements: "Great sins do draw out great grace; and where guilt is most terrible and fierce, there the mercy of God in Christ, when shewed to the Soul, appears most high and mighty." (78)

From here on Grace Abounding becomes an account of his life within the fourth moment, his new life in Christ, what we noted in Paul as the maturing of a man in Christ. There is no doubt of his having turned to Christ and put on his righteousness. Now is the moment of sanctification which finally compasses the rest of his life: his work within the Bedford separatist Church, his calling to be a minister, and—as the narrative breaks off—his imprisonment. This last quarter of the book Bunyan calls "a relation of other of the Lord's leadings with me, of his dealings with me at sundry other seasons, and of the temptations I then did meet withall." (78-79)

Remarkable here is the fact that temptations remain within his new life in Christ. This fact leads Henri Talon to speak of Bunyan's "never-completed conversion." He suggests further that "Bunyan's life was like a series of successive conversions, conversions within conversions, a slow march towards the possession of himself and God."[1] Unfortunately, Talon not only shows his ignorance of the theology of conversion with this sort of rhetoric, he also poisons the springs of conversion imagery. Bunyan's life after his once-for-all conversion was rather a series of temptations, the confronting of which is the content of his maturing in Christ.

There is no mention of a predestination that contains a certainty of final perseverance. On the contrary, life after conversion continues to be a pilgrimage amidst often violent temptation. But the fundamental difference between these temptations and those which came to the unconverted sinner is that now he recognizes that "the Wisdom of God doth order them for my good"; more particularly, and these are the last words of Grace Abounding, they "provoke me to look to God thorow Christ to help me, and carry me thorow this world." (103) Here too we find the seed which will finally blossom into the account of conversion in Pilgrim's Progress.

Before we go on to this imaginative sequel to Grace Abounding, however, it will be good to take a final backward glance on Bunyan's progress through his autobiography; first, at the four-moment structure of conversion which we have traced according to the paradigm found in the prophets, the gospels, Paul, and Augustine. Two other commentators on Bunyan, Roger Sharrock and Dean Ebner, have noted structures of conversion in _Grace Abounding_. Theirs, however, are not based on a historical development of conversion, but rather are limited to the structure which emerges from Calvinistic conversion accounts.

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[1] John Bunyan: The Man and his Works, trans. Barbara Wall (London: Rockliff, 1951), p. 81.

Sharrock finds four stages which at first sight seem different from ours:

> Conversion was no sudden storming of the soul by grace, but a gradual process marked by clearly defined stages: first came conviction of sin, when the Christian was convinced of his share in the general depravity of the human race, and sure that his own good works could avail him nothing; then came vocation or calling, when he had evidence of his election by God, and felt that an unmerited love had set him on the right hand in the awful scheme of predestination; there succeeded to this, justification, the achievement of a saving faith, and sanctification, the growth in holiness of life; finally glorification brought the pilgrim's progress to an end.[1]

He does not include our first moment, the _terminus a quo_ of the process, in which the sinner wanders in his sin without even the grace which gives conviction of sin. By omitting this moment, Sharrock sets the experience of the "old man" outside of the conversion process, something that no narrator of conversion ever does.

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[1] Introduction to Sharrock's edition of _Grace Abounding_, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

Further, Sharrock distinguishes the moment of grace into two separate stages: the first one we have called the negative effect of grace which gives the conviction of sin, the second of the positive calling of the sinner. This is a hallmark of the Calvinistic economy with its emphasis on sinfulness and depravity, but we have seen that an historical study which considers the structure of all conversions reveals that this negative aspect is often omitted. The invariable content of the second moment, however, is the impetus of God's grace in turning the convert.

Sharrock's mention of predestination in his second phase explains why he avoids the active verbs of our third moment of response to grace. Strict Calvinism precludes the free response of the convert. It is not at all clear that Bunyan is thus wedded to the doctrine of predestination.

The fourth moment of the new life of the convert with its gradual maturing in and with Christ is distinguished by Sharrock into two phases of sanctification and final glorification. This seems to overlook the eschatological content of the radical new life of the Christian. However, even here Sharrock is not attempting to be precise nor to present a structure that underlies every religious conversion. He presents his four stages as a readily-apparent outline of Calvinistic conversion accounts.

This is Ebner's intention too, but his stages are more carefully worked out. He begins with the statement: "With only slight variation each Calvinistic prescription for conversion required the soul to pass through four distinct stages of enlightenment during and after its effectual calling."[1] He recognizes that the first stage contains the experience of the "old man":

> The soul of the unregenerate man begins in a state of moral and spiritual blindness. In this condition, natural to the race since the Fall, a man is not only unacquainted with a knowledge of God but self-deceived regarding his own moral nature.[2]

Ebner agrees with Sharrock in distinguishing God's grace into two stages after the Calvinistic pattern. First comes the grace of awakening to sin:

> During the second stage of Calvinistic conversion the sinner's moral complacency is reversed. As the process of mental renewal and illumination begins, the awakening soul is granted a humiliating vision of its own self-deception. Under the instruction of the moral law contained in Scripture, the infinite disparity between the just demands of an unutterably righteous God and one's own moral achievements springs suddenly into view.[3]

Next comes the grace of effectual calling:

> The third stage of enlightenment required by the Puritan formula of conversion involves another reversal of attitude. Just as presumption had to be replaced by humiliation,

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[1] Ebner, p. 41.

[2] Ibid., p. 42.

[3] Ibid.

> and even despair, so despair must in turn be replaced by comfort and assurance. . . . The entire process of effectual calling was to lead to an overwhelming sense of this benevolence, to an irrefutable, existential confidence that one's personal salvation was assured.[1]

Going beyond Sharrock's account, Ebner includes within this third stage the convert's response of faith. He refers to an "act of faith" which is dynamic yet not so voluntaristic as to assume the doctrine of free will:

> The main thrust of the Protestant doctrine of justification of faith alone was decidedly psychological. It was directed toward grounding one's basic relationship to God in a mental event, the act of faith whereby Christ's benefits were applied to the individual soul.[2]

Ebner's four-stage scheme of conversion has the advantage of emerging from a study of all the Calvinistic autobiographies written in England in the seventeenth century. Thus his distinction of God's grace into that which impels a negative awareness followed by that which brings a positive enlightenment has added validity. It also points up the addition which Calvinistic theology made to the tradition of conversion. But whereas this theology makes different emphases in the second and third moments of conversion from what we have seen thus far, still the fourth moment remains substantially the same.

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[1] Ibid., p. 44. [2] Ibid., p. 46.

Ebner's description of his fourth stage, however, reveals one difference from the fourth moment in Dante; the new man carries "the principle of depravity still present in his nature":

> Since the newly declared saint does not attain moral perfection until reaching heaven, he cannot expect his judicial righteousness to guarantee a final freedom from doubt in this life. Periods of despair will recur. Yet in the midst of these new onslaughts of temptation, the true believer will oppose the principle of depravity still present in his nature by refusing to yield full or habitual consent to evil and by renewing quickly his repentance whenever he lapses.[1]

All this discussion of a particularly Calvinistic scheme of conversion has led many to question the originality of Grace Abounding. James B. Pratt provides the most extreme example of these critics when he says: "One cannot read an account of the conversion of the Bunyan-Brainerd type without seeing that its whole course runs along conventional lines predetermined by an unquestioned and accepted theology."[2] Tindall is likewise critical:

> The details of Bunyan's conversion could be supplied by a diligent anthropologist from the autobiographies of other preachers. Even the words "My grace is sufficient for thee" which the Lord Jesus condescended to direct through the tiles to the ears of John Bunyan and by which the salvation of that saint was finally consummated, were the instrument of the orthodox regeneration.[3]

Tindall is not always given to such overstatement. In a more balanced criticism he wryly acknowledges that "the delicate surgery of soul for which Bunyan is known was the monotonous exercise of his contemporaries; but what the Spirit was content to inspire, it was unwilling to preserve, and of these autobiographies Grace Abounding alone has survived."[1]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 46-47. [2] Pratt, p. 149.

[3] Tindall, pp. 33-34.

Henri Talon finally goes the furthest in answering the question of Bunyan's originality within the large number of almost identical Puritan autobiographies:

> The similarities which can be observed in the different works of the period are not deliberate plagiarism. Imitation of one author by another plays its part in literary creation, but it is secondary and often fortuitous; whereas it is of primary importance in the formation of a mind. It is not books that copy books, but souls that copy souls. . . . Bunyan and all his brother preachers were participators in the same Puritan faith. All, therefore, can use the same terms and yet each remain deeply sincere.[2]

Another aspect of this problem of originality that must be confronted is the difference between the experience of undergoing religious conversion and the literary description of that experience. The first is what Schorer called the lump of experience, the latter the achieved-content which results from the author's technique. We can be sure, for example, that Augustine had a personal conversion experience, but not that it actually took place in the garden at Milan or literally followed the "take and read" pattern of the conversions of Simplicianus, Anthony, and the two men at Trier. No one dares call Augustine unoriginal because he patterns his account after other accounts, so we should be wary of calling Bunyan such because he patterns his account after those of his contemporaries.

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[1] Ibid., p. 22.

[2] Talon, pp. 26-27.

But whereas it is unfruitful to question Bunyan's originality, it is important to inquire into his reliability. How literally should we take his autobiographical account? We have no reason to disbelieve the broad outlines of his story: that he once was a man of little belief, that through God's grace he became a committed Christian, subsequently a preacher, and finally was imprisoned for his preaching. But what about the details that flesh out this skeletal structure?

The title of the book gives the first clue to how we must take what follows. Bunyan for all his faults is not "the Chief of Sinners." John Donne, early in his ministry, was also tempted to assume this Pauline stance in one of his sermons by calling himself "the chiefest of sinners." This exaggerated role, a cliché long before Bunyan assumed it, did not suit Donne; he discarded the phrase in a later revision of the sermon and never resorted to the formula again.[1]

Bunyan's biographers are fond of pointing out that his family descent was far from as mean, despised, and low as he would have it. Another obvious exaggeration of his poverty was too much for even Bunyan to countenance. Thus his comment on his wedding is changed in the third edition from the statement of "not having so much as a Dish or Spoon betwixt us both" to a much-softened "not having so much household-stuff as a Dish or Spoon among us." (8)

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[1] The Sermons of John Donne, ed. C. R. Potter and E. M. Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953-60), 2:388.

No doubt in these exaggerated poses Bunyan was conforming to the conventions of seventeenth-century Puritan conversion accounts. Likewise his talk of voices and scripture texts which "suddenly dart from Heaven into my Soul." (1) We have one momentary glimpse into Bunyan's own misgivings over the conventions he was using, or perhaps over the criticism he imagined might be one day leveled against his reliability. After a strong burst of consolation "I said in my Soul with much gladness, Well, I would I had a pen and ink here, I would write this down before I go any further, for surely I will not forget this forty years hence; but alas! within less than forty days I began to question all again." (30) Sharrock's comment on this passage is that it "suggests that even during the period of his conversion Bunyan was beginning to record his spiritual experience."[1] Whether intended or not, this passage, besides suggesting that his autobiography is

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[1] Notes to Sharrock's edition of Grace Abounding, p. 141.

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based on notes taken while his conversion was taking place, serves as an apology for his reliability.

Bunyan indulges in a more obvious apologetic in the Preface to Grace Abounding:

> I could have enlarged much in this my discourse of my temptations and troubles for sin, as also of the merciful kindness and working of God with my Soul: I could also have stepped into a stile much higher than this in which I have here discoursed, and could have adorned all things more then here I have seemed to do: but I dare not: God did not play in convincing of me; the Devil did not play in tempting of me; neither did I play when I sunk as into a bottomless pit, when the pangs of hell caught hold upon me: wherefore I may not play in my relating of them, but be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was: He that liketh it, let him receive it; and he that does not, let him produce a better. (3-4)

Here Bunyan is clearly sensitive to real or imagined criticism that his style is too contrived; his answer is that he "could have adorned all things more than here I have seemed to do." His rejection of "play" and his insistence upon a "plain and simple" style in which he could truthfully "lay down the thing as it was" finally functions, whether intentionally or not, as a plea for his own reliability as the narrator of his conversion.

His talk about a higher style in which he could have written contains a promise of a subsequent work which would be written in just such a style. We are immediately reminded of Dante's similar promise at the conclusion of the Vita nuova that he would write no more until he could do so in a nobler way. Surely Pilgrim's Progress is Bunyan's nobler way of treating the conversion

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experience, just as the Commedia had been Dante's.

We have commented at length in the Dante chapter on how the Vita nuova betrayed the style or technique of an immature writer. Its over-concern with an inner landscape of conversion was just one evidence of this immaturity. The outer world was almost totally neglected. But is not this the case with Bunyan as well? The abstractness of Grace Abounding is only emphasized by the few concrete details which intrude themselves. This, I would submit, is both a sign and a result of the author's immaturity, just as his almost endless struggle with temptations, emotional flights and plummets, were sign and result of his immature Christianity. Only with growing maturity, both as convert and artist, could Dante write the Commedia; likewise with Bunyan.

Paul had recognized that the fourth moment of conversion was a maturing in Christ. It would seem that any autobiographical account of conversion, if sensitively done, would recreate both in description and technique the experience that "when I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child"—indeed, that I wrote like a child.

Ebner believes that in Bunyan's adherence to this immature style he was merely imitating the other autobiographers of his age, for "the same preoccupation with the needs of the inner life to the exclusion of the outer

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is paralleled in nearly every other autobiography written by other Particular (Calvinistic) Baptists and by Independents."[1] This may be so, and yet Bunyan's superiority to all these writers must open us to explanations based on more artistic and theological grounds.

What I am suggesting is that Bunyan, more or less consciously, wrote Grace Abounding in a childish or immature manner. Anyone who doubts that he had stripped the concrete detail from the book, or that he was not consciously avoiding the outer landscape of his conversion experience, need only compare it with "A Relation of My Imprisonment." As Roy Pascal comments:

> Nothing in Grace Abounding compares in clarity and vivacity with this account of his arrest and trial, of the bearing of the magistrates, and of the intercession of his wife before the Assize Court. It gives sharp contours to a personality that in the autobiography remains somewhat blurred.[2]

This brief account of his imprisonment prepares the reader for the concrete, descriptive—in fact, mature—technique of Pilgrim's Progress.

Pilgrim's Progress

We have commented on Bunyan's apologetic tone in the Preface to Grace Abounding. Prefatory to Pilgrim's Progress he assumes a much stronger tone in what he calls "The Author's Apology for his Book." First of all he

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[1] Ebner, pp. 26-27. [2] Pascal, p. 34.

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reveals the occasion and the nature of this new book:

> I was writing of the Way
> And Race of Saints in this our Gospel-Day,
> Fell suddenly into an Allegory
> About their Journey, and the way to Glory. (1)[1]

He then narrates the difficult process of deliberation he went through as to whether he should publish "this my Scribble." Why the problem? It was his unconventional method and style:

> May I not write in such a stile as this?
> In such a method too, and yet not miss
> Mine end, thy good? why may it not be done? (2)

His unconventional style soon reveals itself as the primary subject of his apology. He describes it as "allegory," "metaphors," "dark figures," "fable," "fancies," and "riddles." In order to justify himself against objections which are implied throughout the Apology, he makes appeal to the style of the scriptures. He compares his method with the metaphors of the prophets, the "Wives Fables" in Timothy, and the parables in Paul. He sums up his argument thus:

> I find not that I am denied the use
> Of this my method, so I no abuse
> Put on the Words, Things, Readers, or be rude
> In handling Figure, or Similitude,
> In application; but, all that I may,
> Seek the advance of Truth, this or that way:
> Denyed did I say? Nay, I have leave,

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[1] The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to That Which is to Come, ed. James Blanton Wharey, 2d ed. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967). All quotations will be numbered in the text according to this edition.

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(Example too, and that from them that have
God better pleased by their words or ways,
Then any Man that bretheth now adays,)
Thus to express my mind, thus to declare
Things unto thee that excellentest are. (5-6)

At the end of his Pilgrim's Progress Bunyan adds "The Conclusion" in which he further reveals his concept of allegory and its interpretation:

> Take heed, also, that thou be not extream,
> In playing with the out-side of my Dream:
> Nor let my figure, or similitude,
> Put thee into a laughter or a feud;
> Leave this for Boys and Fools; but as for thee,
> Do thou the substance of my matter see.
> Put by the Curtains, look within my Vail;
> Turn up my Metaphors and do not fail:
> There, if thou seekest them, such things to find,
> As will be helpful to an honest mind. (164)

There is no sophisticated fourfold method of interpretation as expressed in Dante's letter to Can Grande, but rather a naive theory of allegory presented to an audience acquainted with metaphor only in its biblical contexts, and with interpretation only in a literal reading of scripture. It conforms to what Thomas Aquinas calls the moral sense of interpreting scripture according to which "the things done in Christ and in those who prefigured him are signs of what we should carry out."[1] What is surprising is not that Bunyan presented such a naive allegory, but that he presented one at all. But despite the misgivings of the Apology, Pilgrim's Progress was immediately successful. So starved were the Puritans of the seventeenth century, and Protestants of every denomination in subsequent centuries, for such a mixture of doctrine and imagination that Pilgrim's Progress has become the classic account of religious conversion in the English language.

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[1] Summa theologica I, 1, 10.

As we have already noted, Dr. Johnson both admired Bunyan's work and noticed its similarity with Dante's Commedia. Their two beginnings are amazingly alike. Not because Bunyan had the advantage of reading Dante (which Johnson recognized was impossible), but because there was a structure and an imagery of conversion which both had fallen heir to.

Dante began his Commedia with a description of his plight:

> Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
>   mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
>   che la diritta via era smarrita.
> Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
>   esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
>   che nel pensier rinova la paura!
>
> Midway in our life's journey, I went astray from the straight road and woke to find myself alone in a dark wood. How shall I say what wood that was! I never saw so drear, so rank, so arduous a wilderness! Its very memory gives a shape to fear.[1]

When Bunyan sets the scene for his own account of conversion, the elements of description and emotion read almost like a paraphrase:

> As I walk'd through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place, where was

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[1] Inferno 1:1-6.

> a Denn; And I laid me down in that place to sleep: And as I slept I dreamed a Dream. I dreamed, and behold I saw a Man cloathed with Raggs, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own House, a Book in his hand, and a great burden upon his Back. I looked, and saw him open the Book, and Read therein; and as he read, he wept, and trembled: and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry; saying, what shall I do? (8)

Here again we have the elements of a man lost and alone in the wilderness, mysteriously burdened, half-asleep and half-awake, completely bewildered by his plight.

Both protagonists have the same desire: turn back to the true way and escape from the wilderness of sin. How each achieves this conversion forms the plot of his particular story. In Dante conversion takes place according to the Catholic model as defined by the councils and theologians of the medieval church. In Bunyan the conversion of Christian is according to a Protestant model based upon biblical revelation, evangelical preaching, and the tenets of the reformers, especially John Calvin.

The moment of wandering in Pilgrim's Progress describes Christian—his name at this point, we later learn, is Graceless—"cloathed with Raggs, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own House, a Book in his hand, and a great burden upon his Back." (8) He wanders about crying "what shall I do?" as he reads in his book about the inevitability of death and judgment. Like Dante, Christian is lost; the former's dark wood is the latter's City of Destruction. From his reading of the Bible he recognizes his plight just as Dante had recognized his in the inability to make any progress in the face of the three beasts.

Christian has reached the point where he does not know where to turn. The moment of grace comes into his life in the person of Evangelist who gives him a parchment roll which reads, "Fly from the wrath to come."

> The Man therefore Read it, and looking upon Evangelist very carefully; said, Whither must I fly? Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide Field, Do you see yonder Wicket-gate? The Man said, No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining light? He said, I think I do. Then said Evangelist, Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto, so shalt thou see the Gate; at which when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.
>
> So I saw in my Dream, that the Man began to run; Now he had not run far from his own door, but his Wife and Children perceiving it, began to cry after him to return: but the Man put his fingers in his Ears, and ran on crying, Life, Life, Eternal Life: so he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the Plain. (10)

The moment of grace is not mediated by any natural wisdom or virtue as in the case of Dante, but by revelation of God in the scriptures. Bunyan's marginal gloss on the above passage is "Christ and the way to him cannot be found without the Word." There is no room here for any natural morality, even that of family piety. The first three moments of conversion become a personal pilgrimage in the spirit of the American folk song:

> You've got to walk that lonesome valley,
> you've got to walk it by yourself,
> nobody else can walk it for you,
> you've got to walk it by yourself.

Christian's valley is indeed lonesome, though he is never alone for long. If he is the hero of this quest, to introduce terms borrowed from the structuralist Vladimir Propp, then the characters he meets upon the way are either opponents—bent on turning him from his way—or donors—bent on helping him.[1] Thus the opponents amount to temptations, outer manifestations of those that tortured Bunyan himself in Grace Abounding; donors, on the other hand, amount to gifts or mediators of God's grace.

Christian's first opponents are his wife and children who "cry after him to return." Next he meets Obstinate and Pliable who "were resolved to fetch him back by force." (10) When Christian finds himself mired in the Slough of Despond—an obstacle rather than opponent, though its function, to turn him away from his pilgrimage, is the same—a new donor appears in the person of Help, who "drew him out, and set him upon sound ground, and bid him go on his way." (15)

The next opponent, Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, is successful in turning Christian out of his way. But the moment of grace is still operative and Evangelist appears again as donor. His question to Christian echoes the conversion imagery which is used throughout the story:

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[1] Morphology of the Folktale, trans. L. Scott (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1958).

"How is it then that thou art so quickly turned aside, for thou art now out of the way?" (20)

With the further aid of Evangelist, Christian finally comes to the wicket-gate and is let in by a third donor, Good-Will. After several visions in the house of Interpreter (again the imagery and mediation of the Bible is central), he comes to the moment of conversion. In the distance he sees the Cross and the Sepulchre. At the Cross his burden falls from his shoulders and rolls down into the Sepulchre. Just as three maidens ministered to Dante after he crossed the Lethe, so here we behold a similar scene:

> Three shining ones came to him, and saluted him, with Peace be to thee: so the first said to him, Thy sins be forgiven. The second stript him of his Rags, and cloathed him with change of Raiment. The third also set a mark in his forehead, and gave him a Roll with a Seal upon it, which he bid him look on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the Coelestial Gate: so they went on their way. Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on singing. (38)

Relieved of his burden and marked with the sign of the elect, Christian sets forth toward the Celestial City. Surprisingly, there is no mention here or elsewhere in Pilgrim's Progress of baptism. .This is certainly a break with the tradition of conversion as found in the gospels, Paul, Augustine, and Dante. Perhaps Bunyan avoided mention of it because of the controversy within the Bedford community—and within the separatist churches in general—between those advocating believer's baptism and others infant baptism. But even without baptismal imagery the radical character of this turning point in the story is striking. For the first time Christian sings, and his song is in recognition of "the beginning of my bliss."

Thus, little more than a quarter of the way into Pilgrim's Progress, Christian has journeyed through the first three moments of conversion. The bulk of the book will be devoted to the fourth moment of his maturing in Christ, surely a development from Grace Abounding with its concentration on the second and third moments. Bunyan had already signaled in his Apology that this work would be written about "the Way and Race of Saints in this our Gospel-Day." (1) And the Saints were those who had passed beyond the third moment of conversion, who were embarked on a pilgrimage beyond the Cross to the Celestial City.

In the Apology, Bunyan had promised to show how "The man that seeks the everlasting Prize . . . runs, and runs, Till he unto the Gate of Glory comes." (6) Christian now begins his final run. It will take him among many strange characters who will function either as opponents or donors to his quest. The donors will be those like Faithful and Hopeful who are convert-pilgrims too, intent on their call to mature in Christ. The opponents will be those who will attempt to turn him out of his way: either directly by Apollyon and the Giant Despair, or indirectly by those who are not converts or those who are converts but continue to speak, think, and reason like children.

Christian meets a group of the latter, converts who fail to mature in Christ, immediately upon his leaving the Cross. They are Simple, Sloth, and Presumption sleeping in chains beside the road and unwilling to be released: "Simple said, I see no danger; Sloth said, Yet a little more sleep; and Presumption said, Every Fatt must stand upon his own bottom, what is the answer else that I should give thee?" (39) Bunyan glosses in the margin that "There is no perswasion will do, if God openeth not the eyes." And so Christian passes on. Later he will meet other characters of this ilk. One is Talkative, a person who "talketh of Prayer, of Repentance, of Faith, and of the New-birth: but he knows but only to talk of them." (78)

Even later, Christian meets By-ends, who admits that he and his townsmen from Fair-speech (Lord Turn-about, Lord Time-server, Mr. Smooth-man, Mr. Facing-bothways, Mr. Anything, and Parson Two-tongues) all

> . . . somewhat differ in Religion from those of the stricter sort, yet but in two small points: First, we never strive against Wind and Tide. Secondly, we are alwayes most zealous when Religion goes in his Silver Slippers; we love much to walk with him in the Street, if the Sun shines, and the people applaud it. (99)

Sharrock suggests that Bunyan had the Established Church in mind in this episode.[1] In The Strait Gate, Bunyan had described a similar character, "the temporizing latitudinarian," whose "religion is always, like the times, turning this way and that, like the cock on the steeple; neither hath he any conscience but a benumbed and seared one, and is next door to a downright atheist."[1]

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[1] Commentary to Sharrock edition of The Pilgrim's Progress, p. 328.

The judgment of By-ends and his fellows is surely that of the Established Church towards the Puritans: they "are so rigid, and love so much their own notions, and do also so lightly esteem the opinions of others; that let a man be never so godly, yet if he jumps not with them in all things, they thrust him quite out of their company." In a word, Christian and his kind "are righteous over-much, and such mens ridgedness prevails with them to judge and condemn all but themselves." (101) Bunyan, however, has the last say about such changeable pilgrims. Shortly, Demas lures By-ends and his fellows to their ruin in his Silver-Mine.

These, then, are the pilgrims who fail to mature in Christ. They are converts in the orthodox manner: namely, passing through the wicket-gate and by way of the Cross. But they become opponents to Christian's pilgrimage because they fail to fight the good fight and thus by their immature and faulty Christianity seek to hinder Christian's progress.

The second group of characters which Christian meets after his conversion represents a different sort of opponent. He beholds Formalist and Hypocrisie who "come

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[1] Works, 1:389.

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tumbling over the Wall, on the left hand of the narrow way." (39) These are so-called Christians who seek to bypass the Cross of Christ, the only way of genuine conversion. Such characters, like Ignorance at the end of the story, always seem to espouse notions of conversion which smack of Catholicism, either Roman or Anglo. Formalist and Hypocrisie, for example, call upon "that Custom, it being of so long a standing, as above a thousand years" to justify their manner of entering on the way of salvation. (40) To this, Christian resorts to the certain signs and promises of salvation which mark the Calvinistic doctrine of salvation:

> Surely, think I, when I come to the Gate of the City, the Lord thereof will know me for good, since I have his Coat on my back; a Coat that he gave me freely in the day that he stript me of my rags. I have moreover a mark in my forehead, of which perhaps you have taken no notice, which one of my Lords most intimate Associates fixed there in the day that my burden fell off my shoulders. I will tell you moreover, that I had then given me a Roll sealed to comfort me by reading, as I go in the way; I was also bid to give it in at the Coelestial Gate, in token of my certain going in after it: all which things I doubt you want; and want them, because you came not in at the Gate. (41)

Again poetic justice provides Bunyan's own commentary on false pilgrims. When the three arrive at the hill Difficulty, only Christian takes the narrow way that leads straight up the hill. Formalist and Hypocrisie are lost as they choose the lower ways of Danger and Destruction which lead around the hill. Bunyan's terse gloss reads: "The danger of turning out of the way." (42)

The end of Ignorance is even more violent. The scene is this: Christian and Hopeful are Heaven-bent when they see Ignorance come walking briskly up. He has not come by way of the wicket-gate or the Cross, but rather by a crooked path that winds down from the country of Conceit. Christian and Hopeful, good Calvinists, are taken aback by the lad's presumption. They are even more aghast when he boldly mixes natural and supernatural virtue: "I know my Lord's will, and I have been a good Liver, I pay every man his own; I Pray, Fast, pay Tithes, and give Alms, and have left my Countrey, for whither I am going." (123-24) When they point out that he has not come by way of the wicket-gate and Cross, he horrifies them by answering, "Be content to follow the Religion of your Countrey, and I will follow the Religion of mine." (124)

With this, Ignorance goes his own way, but later the three meet again and the polemic continues. Christian begins, "How stands it between God and your Soul now?" (144) Ignorance answers in a manner reminiscent of Ignatius of Loyola's Discernment of Spirits: "I hope well, for I am always full of good notions, that come into my mind to comfort me as I walk." Christian thinks such good notions, even if they be of God and Heaven and even though Ignorance leave all to attain them, are of no value. Only such notions of the heart which agree with the judgment of God as revealed in the Bible are of any account, and the Bible says of "persons in a natural condition":

> There is none Righteous, there is none that doth good. It saith also, That every imagination of the heart of man is only evil, and that continually. And again, The imagination of mans heart is evil from his Youth. Now then, when we think thus of ourselves, having sense thereof, then are our thoughts good ones, because according to the Word of God. (146)

Ignorance can only answer: "I will never believe that my heart is thus bad." (146)

The discussion turns to justification, and Ignorance makes a confession of his faith:

> I believe that Christ died for sinners, and that I shall be justified before God from the curse, through his gracious acceptance of my obedience to his Law: Or thus, Christ makes my Duties that are Religious, acceptable to his Father by vertue of his Merits; and so I shall be justified. (147)

This doctrine of justification is too Catholic for Christian to stomach. The argument grows more heated along these same battle-lines and then breaks off with each party pursuing its own way to the Celestial City. Christian and Hopeful, however, have the final victory, for when Ignorance reaches the gates of the city he cannot produce a certificate of justification like the one Christian had received at the foot of the Cross. And so the last scene of Pilgrim's Progress shows Ignorance bound hand and foot and being cast into the cave of Hell.

So much, then, for the indirect opponents to Christian's pilgrimage. What about the donors? The first one he meets after leaving the Cross is Watchful, who admits

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him to the Palace Beautiful which represents church-fellowship. The fact that it is located "just by the High-way side" seems to mean that such fellowship is not necessary for salvation. (45) In fact, Faithful, who will be Christian's companion for much of his pilgrimage, passes by without entering the palace at all. Within the palace, among many other sights, Christian beholds the Armory "where they shewed him all manner of Furniture, which their Lord had provided for Pilgrims, as Sword, Shield, Helmet, Brest plate, All-Prayer, and Shooes that would not wear out." (54) Thus does church-fellowship arm its members.

Christian soon needs all these arms as he confronts the dragon, Apollyon, in the Valley of Humiliation. After a fierce combat, the "foul fiend" flees and Christian is left to venture forth into the Valley of the Shadow of Death. At its entrance he meets two men retreating from its horrors. Asked what they have seen, they exclaim:

> Seen! Why the Valley it self, which is as dark as pitch; we also saw there the Hobgoblins, Satyrs, and Dragons of the Pit: we heard also in that Valley a continual howling and yelling, as of a People under unutterable misery; who there sat bound in affliction and Irons: and over that Valley hangs the discouraging Clouds of confusion, death also doth always spread his wings over it: in a word, it is every whit dreadful, being utterly without Order. (62)

Here indeed is a landscape worthy of Dante's Inferno. In fact, Christian soon finds within this valley the mouth of Hell. He has no guide, as Dante had in Virgil, to guide him through this trial. He must rely on the weapons issued at the Palace Beautiful:

> And ever and anon the flame and smoke would come out in such abundance, with sparks and hideous noises, (things that cared not for Christians Sword, as did Apollyon before) that he was forced to put up his Sword, and betake himself to another weapon called All-prayer: so he cried in my hearing, O Lord I beseech thee deliver my Soul. Thus he went on a great while, yet still the flames would be reaching towards him: also he heard doleful voices, and rushings too and fro, so that sometimes he thought he should be torn in pieces, or trodden down like mire in the Streets. (63)

Thus from the heights of consolation he had enjoyed in the Palace Beautiful, he plunges into a desolation much like John of the Cross's dark night of the soul. Nowhere else in Pilgrim's Progress does he feel more alone, more helpless, more assaulted by temptation. Proceeding in this state, kept from despair only by his weapon All-prayer, he comes upon a cave in which the giants Pagan and Pope used to make their dwelling:

> Pagan has been dead many a day; and as for the other, though he be yet alive, he is by reason of age, also of the many shrewd brushes that he met with in his younger dayes, grown so crazy and stiff in his joynts, that he can now do little more than sit in his Caves mouth, grinning at Pilgrims as they go by, and biting his nails, because he cannot come at them. (65)

When we recall how Dante's infernal landscape was teeming with both pagans and popes, we appreciate the different world views of these two artists. In the next chapter we will have the opportunity of adding Joyce's infernal Nighttown to this comparison.

As Christian emerges from the valley, he meets another donor-pilgrim, Faithful, and they continue their journey together. They soon encounter Evangelist who had mediated the grace of conversion for both of them. He reminds them of "the truth of the Gospel, that you must through many tribulations enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." (87) Then he predicts the troubles which await them in Vanity-Fair. The most ominous prediction is that one of them will die there.

So it happens. Shortly after arriving in Vanity-Fair, the place of the Establishment Church, both Christian and Faithful are arrested upon charges "that they were enemies to, and disturbers of their Trade; that they had made Commotions and Divisions in the Town, and had won a party to their own most dangerous Opinions, in contempt of the Law of their Prince." (92-93) The last charge of making converts to their beliefs is the most serious. Faithful states in defense that "the Party that were won to us, were won, by beholding our Truth and Innocence, and they are only turned from the worse to the better." (93) For his alleged offenses Faithful is cruelly killed as Evangelist had predicted.

Christian, however, escapes and goes on his way singing of Faithful's victory. One of the townsmen by the name of Hopeful joins him on the pilgrimage: "Thus one died to make Testimony to the Truth, and another rises out of his Ashes to be a Companion with Christian." (98) This new donor-pilgrim will accompany Christian on the remainder of his journey.

The most formidable obstacle of the entire pilgrimage now stands between these two and their goal. As they push forward, they follow the example of Vain-confidence and turn out of the true way into By-Path-Meadow. They soon realize that they have sinned, but even the voice encouraging repentance—"Let thine Heart be towards the High-way, even the way that thou wentest, turn again"—is of no avail. (113) They fall into the hands of Giant Despair and are imprisoned in Doubting-Castle.

Amid the fearful beatings, starvation, and temptations to suicide which Christian and Hopeful must suffer in Doubting-Castle, their maturity in Christ is put to the test. Christian, despairing, opts for suicide as the only solution. Hearing this, Hopeful articulates that insight which underpins the fourth moment of conversion: the convert can mature in Christ only by renewing the memory of his saving grace. Thus Bunyan had written in the Preface to Grace Abounding:

> It was Pauls accustomed manner, Acts 22. and that when tried for his life, Acts 24. even to open before his Judges, the manner of his Conversion: He would think of that day and that hour, in which he first did meet with Grace: for he found it support unto him. When God had brought the children of Israel thorow the Red Sea, far into the wilderness; yet they must turn quite about thither again, to remember the drowning of their enemies there, Num. 14. 25. for though they sang his praise before, yet they soon forgat his works, Psal. 106. 12, 13. (2)

As Hopeful strives to dissuade Christian from despair, he expresses this same exhortation to remember God's saving deeds:

> My Brother, said he, remembrest thou not how valiant thou hast been heretofore; Apollyon could not crush thee, nor could all that thou didst hear, or see, or feel in the Valley of the shadow of Death; what hardship, terror, and amazement hast thou already gone through, and art thou now nothing but fear? Thou seest that I am in the Dungeon with thee, a far weaker man by nature than thou art: Also this Giant has wounded me as well as thee; and hath also cut off the Bread and Water from my mouth; and with thee I mourn without the light: but let's exercise a little more patience. Remember how thou playedst the man at Vanity-Fair, and wast neither afraid of the Chain nor Cage; nor yet of bloody Death: wherefore let us (at least to avoid the shame, that becomes not a Christian to be found in) bear up with patience as well as we can. (116-17)

Just as the prophets had constantly recalled the exodus, Paul his conversion on the road to Damascus, Augustine his in the garden at Milan (and indeed went on in his Confessions to develop a whole theology of memory), and Dante his in the allegories of Inferno and Purgatorio; so Bunyan continues the tradition of repentance by remembrance. If Christian is to mature in Christ, he must keep foremost in his mind God's grace to him when he was the most immature; more, God's grace even before he was born-anew.

Taking heart in this remembrance, Christian recalls as well the gifts he had received at the Cross: "I have a Key in my bosom, called Promise, that will, (I am perswaded) open any Lock in Doubting-Castle." (118) The key

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of memory opens the lock of doubt, and Christian and Hopeful are soon on their way again with the mortal danger of despair soon far behind them.

Immediately they find themselves in the Delectable Mountains which are in Immanuels Land. (119) From the top of the Hill Clear they are given a glass by the Shepherds —Knowledge, Experience, Watchful, and Sincere—through which they can see the gates of the Celestial City. This Pisgah sight, much like that of Moses at the end of the exodus, is similar to Christian's earlier view from the roof-top of the Palace Beautiful in which he first saw these same Delectable Mountains. Such glimpses seem to be a common enough occurrence of the life of the convert who is maturing in Christ. It is a vision of the final goal, shared alike by the prophets, Paul in his experience of the seventh heaven, John in his Book of Revelation, and Dante in his mystical vision of the Trinity.

The shepherds send the two pilgrims on their way strengthened by this Pisgah sight and chastened by the warning to avoid the Inchanted Ground. They understand this as meaning "that we should beware of sleeping; wherefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober." (136) There follows a sober discussion of the theology of conversion in terms of Hopeful's own experience of turning. It parallels, as we might have predicted, the structure of Christian's own. First, there is a recounting of his life before grace; second, a lengthy enumeration of the effects of grace and an excursus on the vanity of good works; third, a recapitulation of the Calvinistic doctrine of the righteousness of Christ which is "imputed, if I believe on him"; and fourth, the new life of maturing in Christ in which believing and following Christ become one action: "That believing and coming was all one, and that he that came, that is, run out in his heart and affections after Salvation by Christ, he indeed believed in Christ." (141-43)

As though to contrast this orthodox structure of conversion with an unorthodox one, Bunyan has the two pilgrims meet Ignorance. We have already discussed how his un-Calvinistic doctrines provide the last opposition which Christian and Hopeful encounter before they reach the Celestial City.

Crossing the Inchanted Ground safely, they enter into the Country of Beulah which is surprisingly similar to Dante's Earthly Paradise, its "air was very sweet and pleasant, the way lying directly through it, they solaced themselves there for a season":

> Yea, here they heard continually the singing of Birds, and saw every day the flowers appear in the earth: and heard the voice of the Turtle in the Land. In this Countrey the Sun shineth night and day; wherefore this was beyond the Valley of the shadow of death, and also out of the reach of Giant Despair; neither could they from this place so much as see Doubting-Castle. Here they were within sight of the City they were going to: also here met

> them some of the Inhabitants thereof. For in this Land the shining Ones commonly walked, because it was upon the Borders of Heaven. (154-55)

As they walk through this earthly paradise with the Shining Ones, Hopeful and Christian are beset by certain mystical experiences reminiscent of Dante's in his mystical conversion in the Paradiso: "Christian, with desire fell sick, Hopeful also had a fit or two of the same Disease: Wherefore here they lay by it a while, crying out because of their pangs, If you see my Beloved, tell him that I am sick of love." (155)

Two of the Shining Ones tell them that they have two more difficulties to meet with before entering the city. The first is the crossing of the river of death. Despite alternations of fear and guilt, they cross from one life to another. Emerging from the water they put off their clothing of mortality and are carried up to the gates of the city. There they must produce the certificates which they received at the moment of conversion to righteousness at the Cross. They hand these over with no difficulty and enter into the Celestial City which we are told also includes the Mount Zion and the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Bunyan-the-dreamer's last thoughts are much like Dante's at the end of the Commedia. He catches a glimpse of the glory within the gates and hears the angels singing: "And after that, they shut up the Gates: which when I had seen, I wished my self among them." (162)

Bunyan adds a brief twenty-two line conclusion to the Pilgrim's Progress in which he expresses the hope that his dream "will be helpful to an honest mind." And then, in a promise of a second part to his allegory, he says:

> But if thou shalt cast all away as vain,
> I know not but 'twill make me Dream again. (164)

And dream he does, but with nothing near the power, clarity, or imagination which he exhibited before. Ronald Knox says of the Second Part of Pilgrim's Progress, which records the pilgrimage of Christian's wife and four sons: "The fact is, that whereas Christian goes on a pilgrimage, Christiana goes on a walking-tour."[1] Knox goes on to analyze the content, style, and tone of the Second Part and finally concludes, with tongue firmly in cheek, that the "fortunes of Christiana, strange as it may seem, were foisted upon the world by a woman, jealous for the credit of her own sex, and an Anglican, equally jealous for the reputation of a much-maligned and recently persecuted Church."[2] Knox, of course, is exercising his satirical genius. But he also emphasizes the inferiority of this sequel to Bunyan's masterpiece. And thus we do not attempt an analysis of its conversion structure in this chapter.

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[1] "The Identity of the Pseudo-Bunyan," in Essays in Satire (London: Sheed and Ward, 1928), p. 140.

[2] Ibid., p. 150.

Conclusion

Having surveyed the process of turning to God in both Dante and Bunyan, what conclusions can we draw concerning the Catholic and Protestant models? Let us compare the variations in each of the four moments of conversion.

In the first, the moment of wandering, the two seem identical. Both Dante and Christian are lost; the dark wood and the City of Destruction are painfully close to death. Escape from them seems impossible. The two sinners, moreover, are quite aware of their plight. This awareness for the Calvinistic Bunyan is already a sign of grace, since without it the sinner has no way of recognizing his own depravity. In the Calvinistic economy there is no such thing as natural recognition of sin any more than there is such a thing as natural virtue.

Thus in Bunyan the moment of grace for the predestined Christian actually begins when he realizes his plight. Hopeful explains that "by awakenings for sin, God at first begins the conversion of a sinner." (138) But for Christian the more immediate grace of conversion comes from Evangelist who shows him the Word of God in the Bible: "Fly from the wrath to come." (10) Evangelist also tells him the way he must go for conversion, to the wicket-gate in the distance, and gives him a parchment scroll of the Word of God to guide him. The only guide to conversion becomes the Bible as shown to Christian by

Evangelist and later by Interpreter.

For Dante, on the other hand, natural wisdom (Virgil) and natural virtue (Cato) become the mediators of grace. Dante is so deep in habitual sin that grace (Beatrice) cannot come to him directly. Beatrice sends Virgil to lead Dante along the way to conversion; thus Virgil at this point functions for Dante as the Bible does for Bunyan. Guided by Virgil Dante can make his way through Hell and thus come to an understanding of his own sin and its consequences. This understanding is closed to Christian since he has no access to the fire-belching cave of Hell. Nor is there any place of Limbo in the Bunyanesque Hell for the virtuous pagans who, though ignorant of Christ, choose the best natural morality they know. Hell is Hell and it is the resting place of all, pagan and Christian alike, who are not justified by the righteousness of Christ as revealed by the Word of God.

For Dante, true conversion can come only after grace and natural wisdom have led the sinner to an understanding of sin. Once he has plunged to the very center of sin in the Inferno he can begin the climb to the moment of conversion. The understanding of sin in Bunyan comes from the Bible alone and the Bible alone can lead the sinner to this moment. At the same time, of course, Bunyan's understanding of sin is an experienced one, comparable to Dante's even though the occasions differ.

When Christian has passed through the wicket-gate and come to the Cross, he finally arrives at the moment of conversion. No Church is necessary to mediate it. The sinner before the crucified Christ is enough. The burden of past sin rolls off his shoulders and is buried in the Sepulchre. The sinner is now signed with the sign of the elect and is sent on his way to the Celestial City.

In Dante's Catholic model, the Church and the sacrament of penance play an indispensible part in the moment of conversion. The sinner mounts the three steps of confession, repentance, and satisfaction before his conversion is complete and the door opened by the two keys given to Peter and passed on to the Church. The seven P's cut in his forehead, representing the last vestiges of the seven capital sins, are reminders to the converted sinner that he must yet cleanse himself of the effects of these sins in his life.

This life-project of cleansing, as well as the project of avoiding the temptation to turn back to a pre-conversion way of life, becomes the content of Dante's moment of maturing in Christ. In Bunyan's moment only the latter project of avoiding temptation has any meaning. All burden of sin was shed at the moment of conversion-justification. Thus there is no need for a Purgatory after death to cleanse one of the effects of sin which were not purged during life; Christian could pass unharmed the senile giant, Pope, who calls out: "You will never mend, till more of you be burned." (66) Once Christian has been converted and justified at the foot of the Cross, his only goal is the Celestial City if he remains constant in his faith, or Hell if he should backslide or fall into despair in Doubting Castle.

Not only is the Celestial City Christian's only goal; in Bunyan's economy of conversion, there is nothing to add once the goal is reached. Dante's method of presentation was quite different. G. K. Chesterton contrasts the two thus: "It is typical of the two methods, each of them very real in its way, that Dante could write a whole volume, one-third of his gigantic epic, describing the things of Heaven; whereas in the case of Bunyan, as the gates of Heaven open the book itself closes."[1] Except for the moments of consolation which Christian experiences in the house of Interpreter, the Palace Beautiful, and the Country of Beulah, there is little indication of a conversion to mysticism which was so important in the Paradiso. It was simply a fact that Bunyan had no access to the great body of mystical and spiritual literature which Dante enjoyed.

Both artists were men of their times, and if their times gave them access to different spiritual traditions, it was in the theology of mediation where the differences were the most fundamental. In the Catholic model of conversion the grace of conversion comes through many

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[1] The Thing (London: Sheed and Ward, 1939), p. 157.

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mediators while in the Protestant model it comes only through the Word of God as revealed in the Bible. The Catholic view, perhaps, was forced upon her by the missionary experience of the early Church. As the Church spread among the Gentiles, it was evident that the grace of conversion was infinitely adaptable to the situations of different cultural conditions. On the other hand, the Protestant Reformation took place against the backdrop of established Christianity. In all of Pilgrim's Progress we have only the fleeting view of one non-Christian, the person of Atheist, whereas the Commedia is populated by ancient Greeks and Romans, figures from classical mythology, pre-Christian Israelites, and non-Christian philosophers. Dante's world was far too diversified to allow Bunyan's two alternatives: the Celestial City for the elect and Hell for all the rest.

At this juncture in our study, this distinction between Catholic and Protestant models becomes inadequate. The Anglican Church is certainly Protestant while sharing a sense of the same Church-tradition with Dante. Ernst Troeltsch has introduced a distinction between Church-type Christianity and sect-type which, though problematic in many of its sweeping generalities, is useful for our study.

Elements of what we have been calling the Catholic model, Troeltsch finds in the Church-type: "The Church is that type of organization which is overwhelmingly conservative, which to a certain extent accepts the social order, and dominates the masses; in principle, therefore, it is universal, i.e. it desires to cover the whole life of humanity."[1] We recognize at once that this describes the Church in which Dante lived and wrote and made his journey in the Commedia. As for the possibility of Dante being led first by the non-Christian Virgil and then by Beatrice, Troeltsch explains that the Church "relates the whole of the secular order as a means and preparation to the supernatural aim of life, and it incorporates genuine asceticism into its structure as one element in this preparation, all under the very definite direction of the Church."[2] This asceticism, which Beatrice represents for Dante, is not something which is isolated from the real world and its social and political realities: "The asceticism of the Church . . . presupposes the life of the world as the general background, and the contrast of an average morality which is on relatively good terms with the world."[3]

Dante, despite violent objections to the shortcomings of the Church's popes, clergy, and laymen, never gives any indication of wishing to be outside its membership, any more than Chaucer did. And this because the Church always transcends the sinners and faults which may exist within it. Troeltsch summarizes the reasons for

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[1] The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, trans. Olive Wyon, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 1:331.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 332.

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this attitude:

> The essence of the Church is its objective institutional character. The individual is born into it, and through infant baptism he comes under its miraculous influence. The priesthood and the hierarchy, which hold the keys to the tradition of the Church, to sacramental grace and ecclesiastical jurisdiction, represent the objective treasury of grace, even when the individual priest may happen to be unworthy; this Divine treasure only needs to be set always upon the lampstand and made effective through the sacraments, and it will inevitably do its work by virtue of the miraculous power which the Church contains.[1]

Reflecting on this _ex opere operato_ notion of the sacramental system and its corollary, that the Church fills up what is lacking in either priest or layman, we realize that the theology of conversion expressed by Ignorance in _Pilgrim's Progress_ is decidedly Church-type. He knows he is not a saint but is sincerely following the good inclinations of his heart. Because he thus relies on his "natural condition" Bunyan has him carried to Hell from the very threshold of the Heavenly City. No such hard-line theology is found in Dante or in the Church-type of Christianity. Toreltsch explains: "The Church is the great educator of the nations, and like all educators she knows how to allow for various degrees of capacity and maturity, and how to attain her end only by a process of adaptation and compromise."[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 338. [2] Ibid., p. 339.

In the sect-type of Christianity, as Troeltsch describes it, there is less inclination toward adaptation or compromise. Rather, it displays differing emphases from the Church-type in most of its characteristic features:

> lay Christianity, personal achievement in ethics and in religion, the radical fellowship of love, religious equality and brotherly love, indifference towards the authority of the State and the ruling classes, dislike of technical law and of the oath, the separation of the religious life from the economic struggle by means of the ideal of poverty and frugality, or occasionally in a charity which becomes communism, the directness of the personal religious relationship, criticism of official spiritual guides and theologians, the appeal to the New Testament and to the Primitive Church.[1]

Whereas the Church is born into and provides from the first a context in which Christians come to terms with the world, undergo conversion, and pursue lives of varying degrees of perfection, the sect, on the contrary, is "a voluntary community whose members join it of their own free will." Thus conversion is not an event that takes place in the life of a nominal Christian (as in the cases of Augustine or Dante), but is the initial step to becoming a Christian. This, of course, precludes the possibility of an _ex opere operato_ sacramental system, which in turn makes the Christian's maturing in Christ a personal endeavor or pilgrimage. Troeltsch generalizes the sect view of conversion and sacraments thus:

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[1] Ibid., p. 336.

> An individual is not born into a sect; he enters it on the basis of conscious conversion; infant baptism, which, indeed, was only introduced at a later date, is almost always a stumbling-block. In the sect spiritual progress does not depend upon the objective impartation of Grace through the Sacrament, but upon individual personal effort; sooner or later, therefore, the sect always criticizes the sacramental idea.[1]

From this brief analysis of Church-type and sect-type Christianity, we recognize that Bunyan was as unmistakeably part of the latter as Dante was of the former. In fact, it is safer for our purposes in this study of the structure of conversion—rather than, strictly speaking, its theology—to leave Bunyan within this larger category of sect-type Christianity. To attempt to trace the influences of Calvin and Luther in his theology of conversion is outside our purpose. To determine whether his theology was doctrinally more that of the General Baptists or the Particular Baptists, or whether it was more that of the Congregationalists or the Baptists as a whole, is likewise outside our purpose.

Moreover, in such studies it is a common fault to mistake the essential fact that in Pilgrim's Progress Bunyan was writing as an artist, no matter how he may have written in his theological tracts. The same must be said of Dante and even Augustine. The artistic work is not a theological text; nor is a literary autobiography, by the same token, a casebook of religious psychology as William James, E. D. Starbuck, James B. Pratt, and other psychologists of religion have revealed by their many absurd conclusions arising from literal readings of Augustine, Dante, and Bunyan.[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 339.

Chesterton, his usual apologetic tone notwithstanding, makes a wonderful comment on Bunyan's universalism within Pilgrim's Progress:

> He was a Puritan; but he was emphatically not a Puritan of the Puritans. He was a man actually suspected by his fellow Puritans, because he was not so much a Puritan as a Christian. It was remarked at the time, and it has often been remarked since, that his theory is not very sectarian by the standard of seventeenth century sects. Among the Calvinists he was so much of a moderate, that thousands must have

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[1] Pratt, for example, can say of Bunyan's Grace Abounding:

> "The 'conversion' which he has described to us and which has been held up as a splendid example by all the generations of evangelical teachers from his day to ours is almost entirely a matter of feeling, and has little more moral significance than the struggle, which most of us have experienced, between two haunting and obsessing tunes which go running on in a man's mind till one drives the other out." Pratt, p. 145.

At the very heart of the problem of these psychologists of religion is the fact that they have no way of dealing with the second moment of conversion, that of God's grace drawing the soul to conversion. Lacking any possibility of measuring or explaining this moment, they concentrate on the first moment (describing it, for instance, as the conflict of the divided self on the one hand, or the absence of a center of loyalty on the other); the third (distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary conversion, or intellectual and emotional); or the fourth (cataloguing them as permanent or temporary, and describing them as the attainment of unity).

But in the end they fail because grace remains a mystery. Every convert appeals to it, but none is able

> read his great book without thinking about Calvinism at all.[1]

Chesterton is correct in his insight that Pilgrim's Progress somehow runs contrary to Bunyan's Calvinism. Bunyan was quite aware of this as evidenced by the lengthy Apology for his use of allegorical style. It is true that the Calvinism of Bunyan's day did not spawn any other such allegorical work. Grace Abounding, on the other hand, was much more an orthodox, literal, and conventional work within the Calvinistic tradition. But though Bunyan may have begun his autobiography as more literal than literary, the genius of his imagination began to breach the wall of his literal orthodoxy when he attempted to describe the following vision:

> About this time, the state and happiness of these poor people at Bedford was thus, in a kind of Vision, presented to me: I saw as if they were set on the Sunny side of some high Mountain, there refreshing themselves with the pleasant beams of the Sun, while I was shivering and shrinking in the cold, afflicted with frost, snow, and dark clouds; methought also betwixt me and them I saw a wall that did compass about this Mountain; now, thorow this wall my Soul did greatly desire to pass, concluding that if I could, I would goe even into the very midst of them, and there also comfort myself with the heat of their Sun. (GA 19)

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to move beyond a simple descriptive level. The psychologists' use of pathological categories presents an unsatisfactory, unscientific, and often absurd attempt at explanation.

[1] Chesterton, p. 238. Lest this judgment seem too much the whimsey of Chesterton's paradox, we refer to A. C. Underwood's surprise at finding that Bunyan, "that man whom all the world knows, had so little influence upon his fellow-Baptists in his own lifetime." A History of the English Baptists (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1947), p. 104.

Bunyan goes on to interpret the allegory of this vision, concluding that the gap in the wall was Jesus Christ. Thus we have in this brief interlude the foreshadowing of _Pilgrim's Progress_. But even more, we have an allegory of Bunyan himself passing through the wall of literalism, both in theology and in literary technique.

For the artist, religious conversion is inseparable from artistic conversion. The radical turning between Dante's _Vita nuova_ and _Commedia_ is paralleled by Bunyan's artistic turning between _Grace Abounding_ and _Pilgrim's Progress_. We now move on to James Joyce prepared to look for the same phenomenon in his _Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man_ and _Ulysses_.

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CHAPTER V

JAMES JOYCE'S PORTRAIT AND ULYSSES

If Dante and Bunyan are strange bedfellows, how much stranger a fellow is James Joyce to introduce into their company. It is possible, however, to imagine the exiled Florentine and the self-exiled Dubliner sitting on the edge of their beds discussing Aquinas or Virgil or the theme of descent into Hades. But Bunyan, although surely at home among most exiles, would find their conversational mixing of pagan and Catholic subjects quite alien.

Listening to Joyce, Bunyan might think alternately of his characters Mr. Worldly-Wiseman or Ignorance, or perhaps even Arthur Dent's character, Antilegon, in The Plaine Mans Path-way to Heaven. This Antilegon is called "a notable Atheist, and caviller against all goodnesse."[1] When his companion Asunetus is converted and turns against him, he answers with what we have come to recognize as a typically Joycean catalogue:

> Tush, tush, now I see you are in a melancholy humour. If you will goe home with me I can give you a speedie remedie; for I have many pleasant and merry bookes, which if you should heare them

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[1] Dent, p. 2.

> read, would soone remedie you of this melancholy passion. I have the Court of Venus, the Palace of pleasure, Beuas of Southampton, Ellen of Rummin; The merry jest of the Frier and the Boy; The pleasant story of Clem of the Clough, Adam Bell and William of Cloudesley; The odde tale of William Richard, and Humfry; The pretie conceit of John Splinters last Will and Testament; which all are excellent and singular bookes against heart-qualmes; and to remoove such dumpishnesse, as I see you are now fallen into.[1]

Joyce would have delighted in such an enumeration of books, not only because it provides one of the most concrete, human moments in Dent's whole treatise, but also because Joyce's own imagination needed such catalogues of concrete items—as concrete as the directory of Dublin's street-numbers—in which to plot the curve of his fiction and, more to the point of our study, his conversion. Or rather Stephen Dedalus' conversion, for we must guard against making Stephen a strictly autobiographical character. Instead of discussing Joyce's own conversion, we can only discuss Stephen's.

But what sort of conversion are we talking of? Not one like Paul's or Augustine's or Dante's or Bunyan's. Each of theirs "took"; Stephen's patently does not. No, what we must now consider is what William James calls "counter-conversion." James finds that "counter-conversion—that sudden and emotional turning away from Christianity and religion—may follow much the same psychological course as the conventional conversion experience."[1] It is necessary to quote James' rather lengthy summary of this phenomenon if we are to appreciate Joyce's position within the tradition of conversion literature:

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[1] Ibid., p. 373.

> In judging the religious types of regeneration which we are about to study, it is important to recognize that they are only one species of a genus that contains other types as well. For example, the new birth may be away from religion into incredulity; or it may be from moral scrupulosity into freedom and license; or it may be produced by the irruption into the individual's life of some new stimulus or passion, such as love, ambition, cupidity, revenge, or patriotic devotion [or we may add, apropos of Stephen Dedalus, devotion to art]. In all these instances we have precisely the same psychological form of event,—a firmness, stability, and equilibrium succeeding a period of storm and stress and inconsistency. In these non-religious cases the new man may also be born either gradually or suddenly.[2]

This, of course, is not a new insight into conversion. Jeremiah, as we have already seen, recognized the correlative nature of apostasy and repentance. He understood that both meant "change one's loyalty." The heart may change in both directions: toward God and away from him. We will now proceed to examine how Stephen Dedalus experiences both changes in Portrait and Ulysses.

Portrait

We would be stretching it a little to call Stephen a turn-of-the-century Holden Caulfield. But like Holden he was acutely sensitive to the phoniness and injustice of adults. In his later years Joyce liked to pretend that he had always been a rebel, even as a boy in the Jesuit schools he attended. There is no evidence that this was actually so. The same is true with the fictional Stephen Dedalus. Cranly puts it to him directly in Portrait:

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[1] Pratt, p. 126 [2] James, p. 150.

> —It is a curious thing, do you know, Cranly said dispassionately, how your mind is supersaturated with the religion in which you say you disbelieve. Did you believe in it when you were at school? I bet you did.
>
> —I did, Stephen answered. (240)[1]

For Stephen, school had come to mean the Jesuits under whom he studied at Clongowes Woods, Belvedere, and University College. He had begun at the same age that Joyce did, six-and-a-half, and like him had finished at twenty. Jesuit influence remained long after Stephen had rejected their religious beliefs. In Ulysses Buck Mulligan accuses him of having "the cursed jesuit strain in you, only it's injected the wrong way." (8)[2] This parallels an interview comment of Joyce's: "You allude to me as a Catholic; you ought to allude to me as a Jesuit."[3]

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[1] A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York: Viking Press, 1956). All quotations will be numbered in the text according to this edition.

[2] Ulysses (New York: Vintage Books, 1966). All quotations will be numbered in the text according to this edition.

[3] Kevin Sullivan, Joyce Among the Jesuits (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 2.

The first detailed view we have of Stephen under the Jesuits is his pandying at the hands of Father Dolan, the prefect of studies at Clongowes. Stephen is punished while his teacher, Father Arnall, stands by silently. As Stephen listens to "Father Arnall's low and gentle voice as he corrected the themes" he recognizes injustice for the first time: "The prefect of studies was a priest but that was cruel and unfair." (52)

With his heart in his throat, Stephen goes to the rector, Father Conmee, to report that he has been unjustly punished. Father Conmee is kind to Stephen, yet even in this kindness he leaves the boy with an impression of unreality and death: "The rector held his hand across the side of the desk where the skull was and Stephen, placing his hand in it for a moment, felt a cool moist palm." (58) This same skull imagery will reappear when Stephen confers with the director about a Jesuit vocation. Even at their best the Jesuits of Stephen's experience are distant, fading away into a spiritual unreality like the portraits he notices in the hall outside the rector's office:

> Saint Ignatius Loyola holding an open book and pointing to the words Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam in it, saint Francis Xavier pointing to his chest, Lorenzo Ricci with his berretta on his head like one of the prefects of the lines, the three patrons of holy youth, Saint Stanislaus Kostka, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga and Blessed John Berchmans, all with young faces because they died when they were young, and Father Peter Kenny sitting in a chair wrapped in a big cloak. (56)

But for all his kindness Father Conmee later betrays the boy by relating the details of the affair to Stephen's father:

> —Father Dolan and I, when I told them all at dinner about it, Father Dolan and I had a great laugh over it. You had better mind yourself, Father Dolan, said I, or young Dedalus will send you up for twice nine. We had a famous laugh together over it. Ha! Ha! Ha!
>
> Mr. Dedalus turned to his wife and interjected in his natural voice:
>
> —Shows you the spirit in which they take the boys there. O, a jesuit for your life, for diplomacy!
>
> He reassumed the provincial's voice and repeated:
>
> —I told them all at dinner about it and Father Dolan and I and all of us we had a hearty laugh together over it. Ha! Ha! Ha! (72-73)

After this experience, Stephen's attitude toward his Jesuit mentors changes subtly, paralleling his own growing alienation from friends and family. Waiting to go on stage before the school play he notices in the lantern light "the smiling face of a priest" (73), and a short time later he observes another scene which functions as an epiphany: "The excited prefect was hustling the boys through the vestry like a flock of geese, flapping the wings of his soutane nervously and crying to the laggards to make haste." (74) Still later he overhears another of the prefects laughing and talking with an old woman. What emerges from each of these vignettes is a growing assent to what his father had stated most clearly in his Christmas donnybrook with Mrs. Riordan: "We are an unfortunate priestridden race and always were and always will be till the end of the chapter." (38)

All this was just dawning upon the young Stephen. He still had many years left to serve under the Jesuits in the classrooms of Belvedere and University College. But their voices, "urging him to be a gentleman above all things and urging him to be a good catholic above all things," now had a different ring: "These voices had now come to be hollow-sounding in his ears." (83)

Stephen falls into sin; rather, he runs into it headlong. In this state he experiences an unsettling brooding and guilt: "He had sinned mortally not once but many times and he knew that, while he stood in danger of eternal damnation for the first sin alone, by every succeeding sin he multiplied his guilt and his punishment." (103) Such is the knowledge of good and evil granted him after years of conning his penny catechism.[1] But now the catechism definitions are only rhetorical formulations on which Stephen can exercise his adolescent sophistry.

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[1] Virginia Moseley contaminates her whole argument in Joyce and the Bible (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1967) with the gratuitous statement: "Because the Jesuits focused on the Christian religion, the Bible was probably the one literary work Joyce knew best by the time he received his university degree." (p. ix) Nothing could be further from the truth. What he knew of the Bible came through his memorization of the Maynooth Catechism and Deharbe's Catechism, and the study of "Bible history" books which were as close to the Bible as a Classics Comic Book of War and Peace is to Tolstoy's novel. Reading the Bible itself smacked of Protestantism; not even the Jesuits of his time knew the Bible as well as Moseley would have Joyce know it.

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Side-by-side with this youthful scepticism, however, is a romanticism that desires to emulate the exploits of St. Ignatius Loyola (and Don Quixote) before the shrine of the Blessed Virgin: "If ever he was impelled to cast sin from him and to repent, the impulse that moved him was the wish to be her knight." (105) It is this impulse which eventually would bring him to the shrines of Emma, the unknown girl on the Dollymount Strand, and Molly Bloom.

The Jesuits, however, had one more weapon to throw into the battle for Stephen's soul: The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. It would engage both his guilt and his romantic inclinations. The retreat that Father Arnall gives to Stephen and his classmates in chapter 3 of Portrait is in reality only the first "week" of the four that Ignatius outlines in his Spiritual Exercises. This first week has often been called "hell week" because of its emphasis on sin and the four last things: death, judgment, Heaven, and Hell. It is this period of the retreat that emphasizes the negative way of the spiritual life: recognizing one's radical sinfulness and the need for a conversion to a new way of life. The problem with giving a retreat as Father Arnall does, using only the negative way of the first week, is that the retreatant is left in a vacuum. He recognizes his sinfulness and the punishment that he deserves, yet he is given no positive plan to proceed along an affirmative way of growth. There is only the insistence on some vague concept of perfection as the goal. In Stephen's case, at least, the adage is verified: "The greatest enemy of the good is the perfect."

The affirmative way that Ignatius presents to the retreatant, and which Father Arnall stops short of, is a series of meditations on Jesus' public life (second week of the Exercises), passion (third week), and resurrection (fourth). Jesus is presented as a person, both human and divine, whom the retreatant can follow in friendship and confidence. The final meditation of the Exercises, the "Contemplation to Attain Divine Love," is a powerful affirmation of the goodness of the world, a quantum leap of spirituality which is undreamt of by the retreatant who, like Stephen, is laboring in the negative way of hell week. The judgment which must be made on Father Arnall from the point of view of spiritual direction is that he has presented a false, indeed an heretical, picture of spirituality by giving Stephen the first week apart from its context in the total Spiritual Exercises.[1]

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[1] Father Arnall would justify his approach by appealing to the eighteenth annotation of the Exercises in which Ignatius advises: "If the director of the Exercises sees that the exercitant has little aptitude, or little natural ability or that he is one from whom little fruit could be expected, it is better to give him some of the easier exercises until he has gone to confession, and then to give him some methods of examination of conscience and a program for more frequent confession than has been his custom, so that he may preserve what he has gained, without going further into the matter of the election nor into any other exercises beyond those of the first week." The Spiritual

How did the retreat affect Stephen? The very fact that Father Arnall was the director brings a wave of memories from Clongowes flooding in: "His soul, as these memories came back to him, became again a child's soul." (108) The texture of the style becomes as childlike as that of Stephen's days at Clongowes, another use of technique to point up the irony of Stephen's experience. Like a child he believes everything the priest says. His imagination plays upon the rich imagery that Ignatius had built into the Exercises by means of the "composition of place" which Father Arnall explains in terms of a picture of Hell: "We endeavored, that is, to imagine with the senses of the mind, in our imagination, the material character of that awful place and of the physical torments which all who are in hell endure." (127) The images of Hell thus presented to the sensitive Stephen affect him profoundly. Much of his guilt later on in Portrait and Ulysses will be in terms of the damnation and suffering which he believes the Church declares is his inevitable lot as a sinner.

Exercises of St. Ignatius, trans. Anthony Mottola (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1964), p. 42. Stephen, however, as prefect of the sodality was hardly an exercitant with "little aptitude, or little natural ability or . . . one from whom little fruit could be expected." The Exercises which had been intended primarily for individual direction were given wholesale to the boys of Belvedere: special advice intended in the eighteenth annotation for the simple, the uneducated, and the unpromising was applied to a boy of Stephen's sensitivity and promise.

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But the most spiritually crippling image given him by Father Arnall is that of Jesus. Like the heretical Docetists of early Christianity, Father Arnall presents a Jesus who is much more God than man, a Jesus who is only apparently man. He is not a man like us upon whom we can center our lives and our hopes. He is not a centripetal force, attracting our love and labor for building up the Kingdom of God in the world. Rather he is portrayed as a forbidding and angry God, a centrifugal force who hurls us afar in fear and trembling, who must be obeyed perfectly on the pain of eternal punishment. Surely this is similar to the God paring his fingernails from afar whom Stephen uses as his model of the perfect narrator. Unable to cope with a God who is so hopelessly removed from the needs of man, Stephen makes his first move toward a surrogate-Christ (and a counter-conversion) in the form of Emma:

> When the agony of shame had passed from him he tried to raise his soul from its abject powerlessness, God and the Blessed Virgin were too far from him: God was too great and stern and the Blessed Virgin too pure and holy. But he imagined that he stood near Emma in a wide land and, humbly and in tears, bent and kissed the elbow of her sleeve. (116)

As Portrait develops, Stephen separates himself from the Jesuits, and this in keeping with its theme of his growing isolation and alienation from friends, family, Church, and nation.[1] But before he breaks with the Jesuits completely, he flirts with religious conversion and even a vocation in the Jesuit Order.

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[1] As a result of Stephen's criticism of the Jesuits,

At the end of the retreat Stephen makes his confession, but not to a Jesuit. He admits the sinfulness of his past life. This is the fruit that Ignatius desired from the first week of the _Spiritual Exercises_. The recognition of one's sinful wandering life was calculated to prepare the retreatant for the "election" of the second week in which a careful, unemotional choice of a way of life is the goal. But since Father Arnall gives the boys of Belvedere an aborted retreat Stephen is left on his own in the critical first moment of conversion, still feeling and operating with the "child's soul" of his early years at Clongowes.

When Paul was struck from his horse by the Lord on the road to Damascus he was given Ananias to guide him through the process of conversion. Dante was given the guidance of both Virgil and Beatrice to rescue him from his wandering in the dark wood and lead him through Hell and Purgatory into Paradise; Christian was given Evangelist. Stephen, however, is left alone among the horrors of Hell. Father Arnall says nothing of the person of Jesus whom the second week of the _Exercises_ presents as both guide and

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many readers consider that Joyce is capitalizing on an opportunity to savage his former mentors. But as Kevin Sullivan discovered in his research, "the Irish Jesuits even today admit he treated them 'more than fairly.'" (Sullivan, p. 7). This feeling is based in part, no doubt, on the sympathetic treatment of Father Conmee in the Wandering Rocks episode of _Ulysses_.

model for the repentant sinner.

How then does the unguided Stephen follow the way of conversion, the fundamental religious experience which separates believer from unbeliever? We have already described at length the way of conversion according to what might be called the classic Christian model as outlined in the conversion experiences of Paul, Augustine, Dante, and Bunyan. Stephen Dedalus confronts the problem of a relationship with God within the same Christian matrix as each of these did. But he differs from them—save, perhaps, Dante in the Vita nuova—in one aspect which is of major or minor importance depending upon how one has been influenced by modern studies in psychology: Stephen is an adolescent.

Earlier in this study we mentioned A. D. Nock's work in comparative conversion-processes. In a monograph called "Conversion and Adolescence" he pivots a kleig light onto the problem of Stephen's conversion:

> In modern times adolescence has often been associated with some sort of moral and religious crisis, e.g. the reinforcement of pietist Protestantism by an experience actually called conversion, namely a moment in which the individual acquires the conviction of a personal call from God and in which he seems to himself to make fully his own that which he has before simply accepted, and on the other hand what may be called "counter-conversions," violent reactions from traditional belief to some opposites.[1]

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[1] Pisciculi: Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums (Münster: Franz Joseph Dölger, 1939), p. 165.

Nock goes on to ask whether such Sturm und Drang conversion experiences, so much a part of Christian literature, had anything comparable in Greek, Roman, or even Jewish literature. He finally concludes that other than conversion as the sobering up of a person taking on the responsibilities of adult life, there is little evidence of what we call religious conversion:

> Accordingly, we must regard anything like ethical and religious stresses in youth as rare among the Greeks and Romans, just as among the Jews. At two periods which have been mentioned, general problems confronted the young; at other times, apart from those individuals who felt a zeal to become professed philosophers, there was no more than the call to a serious life: religious enthusiasms were probably very rare in the young. The middle and later years of life occasionally involved a turning to philosophy, whether as vocation or as refuge, and increasing age sometimes led to a greater seriousness in relation to religious observances and emotions. At all stages of life we find little which corresponds to the demands made by early Christianity on young and old alike.[1]

But if youths in Greece, Rome, and Palestine did not suffer the Sturm und Drang of adolescence, the Irish-Catholic Stephen Dedalus knew turmoil "in spades." His was a uniquely Christian struggle with religious experience, one which he had to ride out to its decision before he could move on to the more sober concerns of adult life. Perhaps we never see an adult Stephen, perhaps we glimpse one at the end of Ulysses. But as for his rebellion in

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[1] Ibid., p. 177.

Portrait, it is clearly an adolescent one. So much so that Frederick J. Hoffman judges that "Stephen has scarcely done anything that may be said to lead to a full moral consequence; even the decision to confess his sins and turn to the life of the Church is prompted by a painful need to rid himself of bad dreams."[1]

But even Stephen's adolescent conversion experience seems to follow the four-moment structure of wandering, call, response, and new life. Before the retreat Stephen finds himself a wanderer in what Bunyan had called the "City of Destruction": "He had wandered into a maze of narrow and dirty streets. From the foul laneways he heard bursts of hoarse riot and wrangling and the drawling of drunken singers." (100) In this first moment of conversion he becomes a prowler of devious courses between the Scylla of his lust and the Charybdis of his guilt. During the retreat, however, he feels himself called to conversion. He turns away from his life of adolescent wandering in response to the grace he received in the retreat. Yet there is a radical obstacle in the way of conversion that has been offered to him by Father Arnall. He lacks a mediator, a guide to show him the way. He has no genuine relationship with Jesus. As we mentioned before, Stephen knows only a Docetic Christ, one who is

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[1] The Imagination's New Beginning: Theology and Modern Literature (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), p. 39.

God in the disguise of a man—"He is more like a son of God than a son of Mary" (243)—a God who despite a brief earthly visit remains a stern and just judge of every imperfection. Stephen's reaction to a petition for world peace to be signed before a picture of the Tsar is revealing: "Keep your icon. If you must have a Jesus, let us have a legitimate Jesus." (198)

Here he has shot his bolt to the heart of the matter. Jesus must be the paradigm of the Christian. Christian life modeled on an illegitimate Jesus is itself illegitimate. An inhuman Jesus cannot produce Christian humanism, cannot in fact allow humanity at all. No one has ever offered Stephen a legitimate Jesus. His search for a mediator, a genuine messiah, finally leads him in Ulysses to the ironically Christic Bloom.

Stephen's way of conversion is ultimately aborted when he realizes that the new life he is attempting to lead is hopeless. He believes that he is called to the most perfect life possible—in his case the life of a Jesuit—and yet he knows that he is incapable of such perfection. His first inclination—and here the narrative style is still that of a romantic child—is to multiply good works: "He drove his soul daily through an increasing circle of works of supererogation." (147) Stephen pushes himself on in imitation of the hagiographies of the Jesuit boy-saints Gonzaga, Kostka, and Berchmans which he had read at Clongowes and Belvedere:

> His life seemed to have drawn near to eternity; every thought, word and deed, every instance of consciousness could be made to revibrate radiantly in heaven: and at times his sense of such immediate repercussion was so lively that he seemed to feel his soul in devotion pressing like fingers the keyboard of a great cash register and to see the amount of his purchase start forth immediately in heaven, not as a number but as a frail column of incense or as a slender flower. (148)

What emerges from this adolescent fervor is the heresy to which every hagiographer is tempted, and every new convert as well: Pelagianism, what Luther called the heresy of good works. Stephen performs every possible religious ritual as if by so acting he can further his own salvation. He remembers the warning of his Jesuit teachers about conquering spiritual pride: "He had been forewarned of the dangers of spiritual exaltation and did not allow himself to desist from even the least or lowliest devotion, striving also by constant mortification to undo the sinful past rather than to achieve a saintliness fraught with peril." (150) C. S. Lewis, in his autobiography, tells of a similar adolescent experience which caused him to reject religion: "By a sheer mistake—and I still believe it to have been an honest mistake—in spiritual technique I had rendered my private practice of that religion a quite intolerable burden."[1]

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[1] Surprised by Joy (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955), p. 63.

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Stephen is likewise too sensitive and too intelligent to succumb to such scrupulosity. It is dehumanizing and, like the Christian Brothers he passes on the Dollymount bridge, marches in an opposite direction from the fullness of life that his imagination is already trying to comprehend. He has no other choice but to reject on the one hand a false, inhuman Christ and on the other a life of crippling spiritual rigorism.

From the very beginning of the retreat false battle-lines had been marshalled between the human spirit and God, between humanity and the inhumanity of "a grave and ordered and passionless life that awaited him, a life without material cares." (160) During the second talk of the retreat he had imagined his "poor helpless human spirit" in its death throes. (112) It is only after he turns away from the dehumanizing religious duties which had been thrust upon him that he experiences a resurrection which is "the call of life to his soul not the dull gross voice of the world of duties and despair, not the inhuman voice that had called him to the pale service of the altar." (169)

Stephen receives a new call. If response to a call is a turning action, then Stephen's becomes a turning full-circle. He turns away from the priestly vocation: "All through his boyhood he had mused upon that which he had so often thought to be his destiny and when the moment had come for him to obey the call he had turned aside,

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obeying a wayward instinct." (165) He embraces the very wandering that Father Arnall would have called a sinful life:

> His destiny was to be elusive of social or religious orders. . . . He was destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others or to learn the wisdom of others himself wandering among the snares of the world. (162)

In the Commedia Dante had to begin again the process of conversion which had failed in the adolescent conversion of the Vita nuova. He had to wander in the dark wood and experience every circle of the Inferno before he could proceed to the repentance of the Purgatorio. Stephen too realizes, however inchoately, that he must start again, must experience all the sinful world has to offer: "There was a lust of wandering in his feet that burned to set out for the ends of the earth." (170) Even before the retreat he had glimpsed the shape of his inferno of total experience:

> It was his own soul going forth to experience, unfolding itself sin by sin, spreading abroad the balefire of its burning stars and folding back upon itself, fading slowly, quenching its own lights and fires. They were quenched: and the cold darkness filled chaos. (103)

To the question in Bob Dylan's song—"How does it feel to be on your own with no direction home?"—Stephen would answer that, despite the pain and guilt, there was no other alternative: "To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life!" (172) He sees himself embracing life completely. The whole world will be his church and his altar; he will be its priest.[1] Hoffman maintains that Stephen's break from the Church and priesthood is not so radical as he presents it in his adolescent fervor: "He became, in fact, his own Jesuit, judging both practically and morally, never very far away from the actual rituals of the Church, always compensating (in the sense of 'allowing') for losses in insight and terminology incurred through his separation from it."[2]

Once Stephen rejects the notion of becoming a Jesuit, the texture of style changes noticeably. When he had discussed his vocation with the director, the style had been as cold, hard, and unemotional as the imagery of skulls and his imaginings of Jesuits "as men who washed their bodies briskly with cold water and wore clean cold linen." (155) After the decision to refuse the power of priesthood that is offered to him, his whole world changes, or rather his perception of it does. He smells rotten cabbages, laughs spontaneously, and delights in the tumble of sensory details which clutter his home:

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[1] Sullivan contrasts Stephen's vocational crisis with Joyce's own. He concludes "first, that Joyce thought longer and more seriously about becoming a Jesuit than is generally supposed or admitted; secondly, that Stephen's spiritual crisis in the _Portrait_ is neither a factual nor a psychological reenactment of a similar crisis in Joyce's own adolescence; and thirdly, that Joyce's refusal of a vocation is quite distinct from his later rejection of Catholicism, though in the _Portrait_ Stephen's refusal and rejection are made to appear simultaneous." Sullivan, p. 9.

[2] Hoffman, p. 43.

> Tea was nearly over and only the last of the second watered tea remained in the bottoms of the small glass jars and jampots which did service for teacups. Discarded crusts and lumps of sugared bread, turned brown by the tea which had been poured over them, lay scattered on the table. Little wells of tea lay here and there on the board and a knife with a broken ivory handle was stuck through the pith of a ravaged turnover. (162-63)

Cranly will later recall what Stephen said he wanted to do with his life: "To discover the mode of life or of art whereby your spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom." (246) Freedom becomes the primary value in the young artist's life, a value which he perceives has little place in his milieu: "When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets." (203)

Stephen uses Lucifer's words from the retreat as he states his final rejection of a religious conversion in favor of a humanistic one: "Non serviam"; "I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church." (247)

This interpretation of Stephen's turning from religion to human and artistic freedom is at odds with Caroline Gordon's. Maintaining that Portrait "has been misread by a whole generation," she sees Stephen choosing damnation rather than freedom; his rejection of religious conversion "the picture of a soul that is being caught in the act of foreseeing and foreknowing its damnation."[1] On the contrary. Stephen's refusal is not a purely negative act (which would, indeed, be its own damnation in the sense of Yeats' "Hell is the place of those who deny"), but a positive turning toward a new world of art and humanity. Stephen's new world, however, is one which is unashamedly adolescent and romantic and vague: "His soul was swooning into some new world, fantastic, dim, uncertain as under sea, traversed by cloudy shapes and beings." (172)

We noticed a similar quality of experience in Dante's Vita nuova; it alerted us to the problem of the narrator's reliability, to the possibility of irony in the presentation of the adolescent conversion. If there is irony in Portrait, what alerts us to the ironic intentions of the narrator? Wayne Booth acknowledges the complexity of the problem and isolates three difficulties we must struggle with—"lack of adequate warning that irony is at work; excessive complexity, subtlety, or privacy of the norms to be inferred; and vivid psychological realism, which works against our capacity of judgment."[2] Surely

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[1] How to Read a Novel (New York: Viking Press, 1957), p. 213.

[2] "The Problem of Distance in A Portrait of the Artist," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," ed. William M. Schutte (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, A Spectrum Book, 1968), p. 85.

Portrait is guilty of the first; even after many readings Booth must admit that he can discover no clear warning that there is irony at work in the narrator's presentation. As for the third difficulty, _Portrait_ depends almost entirely upon "vivid psychological realism" and thus our judgmental faculties are lulled into uncritical acceptance of whatever the narrator offers.

Finally, it is the second difficulty that must be examined, namely, the "excessive complexity, subtlety, or privacy of the norms to be inferred." Is there a limit to what an author like Joyce can expect from his readers, beyond which the work becomes excessively complex, subtle, or private? How impersonal can an implied-author become before his narrative verges upon the hopelessly obscure? Is the epiphany a legitimate narrative form since its "sudden spiritual manifestation" must evoke reality without any explicit comment? The answers to these questions will underpin any critical reading of _Portrait_.

The indisputable fact is that readers and critics actually gained access to the irony in Joyce's works. It has been a slow process with progressively more enlightened readings over the years since they were first published. Booth himself, though judging _Portrait_ to be flawed by its extreme difficulty of access, has outlined one approach to the novel. After apologizing for not using internal evidence, he suggests an interpretation based upon the external evidence found in the earlier draft of the novel, Stephen Hero. There the implied-author is far less distanced from the narrative and evaluates Stephen's experiences at each step of his development. So much so that some critics have called it a "much more cynical" work. A similar use of evidence external to Portrait would be to appeal to its sequel, Ulysses, where Stephen's behavior and ideas are contrasted with another Joyce-persona, Leopold Bloom.

There is, however, the possibility of detecting irony in Portrait using only internal evidence. Mark Schorer has recognized the problems of the novel and suggested an interpretation based upon the novel's technique: "It analyzes its material rigorously, and it defines the value and the quality of its experience not by appended comment or moral epithet, but by the texture of the style."[1] After an analysis of the novel's structure as a progression of three different styles and methods, he shows how the concluding style of Portrait—"a return to the romantic prose of Stephen's adolescence"—evaluates the quality of the experience. It is the technique of the novel that reveals the irony of Stephen's final decision; Schorer's judgment is that "the end is really all an illusion, that when Stephen tells us and himself that he is going forth to forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race, we are to infer from the very quality of the icy, abstract void he now inhabits, the implausibility of his aim."[1]

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[1] Schorer, p. 20.

Other critics have added to Schorer's judgment by emphasizing that the important part of the title of Portrait is the phrase "As a Young Man." It is an adolescent portrait and thus susceptible to all the illusions of youth. Likewise, it has been pointed out that Stephen's romantic cry at the end of the novel that he would "forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race," hinges on the word "forge" which can mean the ironic "falsify" as well as the more literal "fashion." What emerges clearly then is that just as Stephen Dedalus' religious conversion is a failure in the Portrait, so also his counter-conversion to art and humanity may well be an adolescent fantasy.

It might be asked, then, why Stephen did not convert to Protestantism. When asked this by Cranly, Stephen answers: "I said that I had lost the faith, . . . but not that I had lost selfrespect. What kind of liberation would that be to forsake an absurdity which is logical and coherent and to embrace one which is illogical and incoherent?" (244) This seems to be a common enough reaction of a person who has been brought up in a Church-type of Christianity toward any other church. If Chesterton's polemic is to be believed, "Some people, especially young people, abandon practicing Catholicism. But none of them abandon it for Protestantism."[1] Chesterton is more to the point of Stephen's situation in his comments on the problems of youth who undergo counter-conversion:

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[1] Ibid., p. 21.

> They have a considerable negative revolt against religion, a negative revolt against negative morality. They have a feeling, which is not unreasonable, that to commit themselves to the Catholic citizenship is to take responsibilities that actually act as restraints. But they do not maintain anything like a contrary system of spiritual citizenship, or moral responsibility.[2]

Chesterton finally comments upon the usual result of such adolescent counter-conversions: "But the very laws of life are against the endurance of a revolt that rests on nothing but natural passion; it is bound to change in its proportion with the coming of experience; and, at the worst, it will become a battle between bad Catholics and good Catholics, with the great dome over all."[3] We must turn to _Ulysses_ to see what the "coming of experience" adds to the fourth moment of Stephen's counter-conversion; that is, to the moment of his new life of maturing—not in Christ, but in art and humanity and freedom.

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[1] _The Catholic Church and Conversion_ (New York: Macmillan, 1926), p. 112.

[2] Ibid., pp. 113-14.

[3] Ibid., p. 115.

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Perhaps Chesterton is correct in saying that despite counter-conversions there are in the end only good Catholics and bad ones. C. G. Jung says of Joyce's Catholicism: "Even in his 'overturning' (not to be confused with 'conversion'), Joyce has remained a pious Catholic. . . . His 'counterworld' has the medieval, quite provincial, and quintessentially Catholic atmosphere of an Erin that tries desperately to enjoy its political independence."[1] Thus too Anthony Burgess can call Joyce a "great Catholic writer" like Gerard Manley Hopkins.[2]

We have noted how Troeltsch characterized the Church-type of Christianity as being able to comprehend members of all variety of belief and commitment. Perhaps a sense of this truth leads these critics to term Joyce (and Stephen)—in view of their use of Aquinas and immersion in Christian symbolism and imagery—Catholic. But this is robbing counter-conversion of any moral force. It is as if Joyce-Stephen had made some sort of separate peace with the Church he had left and continued to view from beyond the pale. Moreover, if counter-conversion has no moral force, neither does conversion. Yet no one would call Paul a Pharisee after his conversion, nor Augustine a Manichean after his.

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[1] "Ulysses: A Monologue," quoted in William T. Noon, Joyce and Aquinas (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 15.

[2] Re Joyce (New York: Norton, 1965), p. 266.

The moral force of both conversion and counter-conversion are proved by the quality of the new life that results from it. We must turn to Ulysses to see what it will tell us about Stephen's fourth moment of counter-conversion, and also what it will reveal of Joyce's stance toward religious imagery.

Ulysses

Freedom valued is not freedom gained. At the end of Portrait Stephen is exhilarated by the possibility of escaping the fetters of Ireland, the Catholic Church, and even his home. But he can not escape the chains that bind him to his mother. Mary Dedalus is no Sophie Portnoy, yet she becomes as great a crippling influence. She employs the subtle means that many an Irish mother has used before her, a quiet but obvious sorrow over her son's neglect of religious practices. "Dedalus' Complaint" no doubt has its sexual symptoms, but the ones which interest us here have to do with Stephen's religious experience. In short, to what extent is Stephen's counter-conversion part and parcel of his need to escape his mother's dominance? To answer this we must look back at Stephen's relationship with his mother in Portrait, then see how this relationship continues to haunt him in Ulysses.

In Portrait Irish Catholicism had emerged as a function of the women and priests who largely control it, the priests as guardians of national morals, the women of domestic. They are the eagles who threaten to pull out Stephen's eyes (an ironic mixture of Oedipal and Promethean punishments) if he doesn't apologize. In the Christmas dinner episode Mrs. Riordan comes to the defense of the Church's condemnation of Parnell. Mary Dedalus is in the background trying to quiet the argument (Stephen is present and must not be exposed to such things), but there is little doubt that she would stand with Mrs. Riordan against Kitty O'Shea and for the condemnation of Parnell. Mr. Casey sets forth his case against the priests: "Let them leave politics alone . . . or the people may leave their church alone." (32) Mrs. Riordan's response is as typically Irish as Mrs. Portnoy's chicken soup is Jewish: "God and religion before everything! . . . God and religion before the world!" (39) Mr. Casey, driven to the wall, can only cry out: "No God for Ireland! . . . We have had too much God in Ireland. Away with God!" Mrs. Riordan has the last word, as the alliance of priests and women always has in Joyce's view of the Irish Church: "Devil out of hell! We won! We crushed him to death! Fiend!" (40)

Stephen's own realization of this priest-woman alliance comes in an epiphany at Belvedere in which he overhears Emma and a young priest discussing the Irish Movement:

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> —Yes, yes, the ladies are coming round to us. I can see it every day. The ladies are with us. The best helpers the language has.
> —And the church, Father Moran?
> —The church too. Coming round too. The work is going ahead there too. Don't fret about the church. (220)

The first break between Stephen and his mother comes after he decides to enter the university. It is a confrontation between her faith, which is strengthening, and his own, which is fast-fading:

> Yes, his mother was hostile to the idea, as he had read from her listless silence. Yet her mistrust pricked him more keenly than his father's pride and he thought coldly how he had watched the faith which was fading down in his soul aging and strengthening in her eyes. A dim antagonism gathered forces within him and darkened his mind as a cloud against her disloyalty: and when it passed, cloudlike, leaving his mind serene and dutiful towards her again, he was made aware dimly and without regret of a first noiseless sundering of their lives. (164)

Later Stephen tells Cranly how he and his mother have argued over his refusal to make his Easter duty. He repeats Lucifer's "I will not serve." Cranly becomes the example of the Irish son who would rather perform the practices, no matter how sterile in his own eyes, than add to his mother's suffering. He keeps asking Stephen questions such as "Do you love your mother?" (240) and "Has your mother had a happy life?" (241) Then finally the coup de grâce:

> Your mother must have gone through a good deal of suffering. . . . Would you not try to save her from suffering more even if . . . or would you? . . . Do as she wishes you to do. What is it for you? You disbelieve in it. It is a form: nothing else.

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> And you will set her mind at rest. (241-42)

And yet in the face of all this painful rhetoric, Stephen remains firm. He is convinced which way freedom lies.

In his diary at the end of Portrait Stephen narrates a final discussion with his mother. She says that he will return to the faith because he has a restless mind. Stephen reflects: "This means to leave the church by backdoor of sin and reenter through the skylight of repentance. Cannot repent. Told her so." (249)

In Ulysses Stephen's relationship with his mother changes radically, for between the action of the two novels she has died. We can reconstruct the circumstances of this painful episode in Stephen's life from various memories scattered throughout the book. Stephen is in Paris busy about the task which he had set for himself at the end of Portrait, "forging in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race." There arrives a telegram from his father—"Mother dying come home father" (42)—and he returns at once to Dublin where his mother seems to be suffering less from her final illness than from her son's loss of faith. At her request he plays and sings:

> Fergus' song: I sang it alone in the house, holding down the long dark chords. Her door was open: she wanted to hear my music. Silent with awe and pity I went to her bedside. She was crying in her wretched bed. For those words, Stephen: love's bitter mystery. (9)

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But he cannot grant her every request. He will not kneel down at her bedside and pray for her. Buck Mulligan plays the part of the compromising-son, the same that Cranly had in Portrait:

> —You could have knelt down, damn it, Kinch, when your dying mother asked you, Buck Mulligan said. I'm hyperborean as much as you. But to think of your mother begging you with her last breath to kneel down and pray for her. And you refused. There is something sinister in you . . . (5)

The Cranly-Mulligan judgment on Stephen's conduct is clear: "To me it's all a mockery and beastly. . . . Humor her till it's over. You crossed her last wish in death." (8)

In Ulysses Stephen remembers the deathbed experience of a year before and feels an almost overwhelming guilt, the "agenbite of inwit," a symptom of Dedalus' Complaint. Tormented by the recurring poetry of the Church's last rites (Liliata rutilantium), he sees again his mother laid out in death, the interment, and his visit to Mulligan's house the following day. But most painful of all is the dream he has just had: "Silently, in a dream she had come to him after her death, her wasted body within its loose brown graveclothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, that had bent upon him, mute, reproachful, a faint odour of wetted ashes." (5) This vision emphasizes his loss of faith, his feelings of guilt, and his refusal to perform even the outward show of piety.

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> Her glazing eyes, staring out of death, to shake and bend my soul. On me alone. The ghostcandle to light her agony. Ghostly light on the tortured face. Her hoarse loud breath rattling in horror, while all prayed on their knees. Her eyes on me to strike me down. (10)

His response in the dream is an agonized cry for freedom: "Ghoul! Chewer of corpses! No mother. Let me be and let me live." (10)

Stephen's agony of guilt comes to a climax in the Nighttown scene when his mother appears to him in his drunken stupor. Buck Mulligan is in the background in jester's costume taunting him, while the apparition recalls all she had done for him. Her essential message is that he must pray and repent, he must return to all the empty rituals: "Prayer for the suffering souls in the Ursuline manual, and forty days' indulgence. Repent, Stephen." (581) Moreover, her notion of repentance is not the positive turning of the sinner to a new relationship with God as preached by Jesus in the gospels. Hers is strictly a negative repentance motivated by fear: "Repent! O, the fire of hell!" (581)

Once more Stephen is offered an illegitimate religion and an illegitimate God, a religion and God which very much resemble those of Jansenism. It is true that there is little evidence that this eighteenth-century French heresy actually was brought back to Ireland with the priests returning from the exile of the

Penal Laws.[1] But what emerges from the religious experience of Stephen Dedalus is his struggle against all the characteristics of Jansenism: its inflexible rigorism, excessive moralism (especially in sexual matters), and the belief that humanity has to be kept in check by constant penitential practices. There is also the recurring picture of Jesus as a severe and inscrutable redeemer. And always in the background is the abiding fear of damnation for any deviation from the way of perfection. But perhaps the aspect of Jansenism which is most revealing of Stephen's religious experience is contained in this single sentence from a Church historian: "Jansenism effected a divorce between flesh and spirit, between the sensible and the spiritual, that was disintegrating to moral equilibrium."[1]

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[1] See John Brady and Patrick J. Corish, The Church under the Penal Code, Vol. 4 of A History of Irish Catholicism, ed. Patrick J. Corish, 6 vols. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1967-71), pp. 84-88. Much has been written in recent years of the "myth of Irish Jansenism," especially as constructed by Catholic writers in America. For a persuasive description of this myth and its fallacies, see "The Myth of the Irish: A Failure of American Catholic Scholarship," in The Changing Face of Catholic Ireland, ed. Desmond Fennell (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), pp. 121-34. Perhaps the best explanation for the persistence of this myth rests in what an Irish Jesuit-philosopher told me in an interview, namely that a Jansenistic strain has been found in the Irish character all the way back to the monasticism of the sixth and seventh centuries.

The climax of Stephen's grasp for freedom comes when, in the face of the apparition of both his mother and the spirit of Jansenism, he cries out: "With me all or not at all. *Non serviam*!" (582) With this cathartic cry he smashes the chandelier and rushes out of Bella Cohen's amid apocalyptic upheaval—into the arms of Bloom.

At this point in our study of Stephen's religious experience we have enough evidence to make the judgment that his radical spiritual need is a legitimate Jesus. He needs a human messiah, a messiah as genuine as the cry in the streets he tells Mr. Deasy is his God. At the end of *Portrait* he invoked a possible messiah: "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead." (253) But the mythical Daedalus is as unsatisfying as the Docetic Christ he had been offered by a Jansenistic piety. By the time of the action of *Ulysses* both illegitimate Jesus and empty myth have deserted him. Like Icarus he had flown too near the sun and has crashed to earth, alienated and alone, in the labyrinth of Dublin. Enter, amid the cries and jostling of Dublin's streets, Leopold Bloom.

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[1] *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967 ed., s.v. "Jansenistic Piety," by B. Matteucci. Ironically, it was the Jesuits who were the archenemies of Port Royal and the Jansenists in France. Thus Stephen is not an inverted-jesuit, but an orthodox one in his struggle against the spirit of Jansenism.

Who is this Bloom and what promise does he hold for the wandering Stephen? The gossips in Barney Kiernan's pub should have the answer: "Is he a jew or a gentile or a holy Roman or a swaddler or what the hell is he? says Ned. Or who is he?" The answer: "He's a perverted jew, says Martin, from a place in Hungary." (337) And this leads into a prophecy about Bloom:

> —That's the new Messiah for Ireland! says the citizen. Island of saints and sages!
>
> —Well, they're still waiting for their redeemer, says Martin. For that matter so are we.
>
> —Yes, says J.J., and every male that's born they think it may be their Messiah. And every jew is in a tall state of excitement, I believe, till he knows if he's a father or a mother. (337-38)

Once Bloom is introduced as a messiah, the nature of his messianic mission to Stephen begins to dawn. After a day of near misses their paths finally converge at the Lying-in Hospital where Stephen has come to drink, argue, and blaspheme with the medical students; Bloom to learn of Mrs. Purefoy's parturition. Birth brings them together, a sonless-father and mother-haunted son.

Bloom's role soon becomes that of protector. He takes charge of Stephen's money in Bella Cohen's, fights a rear guard action for the drunken dreamer after he smashes the chandelier, and guides him through both the brawling soldiers and harrassing policement of Nighttown. Without his aid, Stephen would have found himself in the streets penniless, betrayed, and alone. But with Bloom standing as second, Stephen can face up to the soldiers and decisively reverse the negativity of the "Non serviam" with which he had smashed ghost and chandelier: "Damn death. Long live life!" (591) For this affirmation the soldiers strike him down, surely the nadir of his inferno and first glimpse of his purgatorio as "he lies prone, his face to the sky, his hat rolling to the wall." (601) Picking up the hat, "Bloom in gloom, looms down" (607) like the God of Genesis and raises him up by uttering "Stephen" twice, naming him the only time in the novel. This of course is similar to the moment in the Purgatorio when Beatrice utters Dante's name for the first and only time before raising him up into Paradise. Immediately Bloom has a vision in which he raises Rudy, his infant-son, from the dead. Thus in a double-resurrection we see both messiah and father merge in Bloom.

He leads Stephen to the safety of the cabman's shelter "in orthodox Samaritan fashion, which he very badly needed." (613) Richard Ellmann says that "Joyce draws upon Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan to make Bloom's unassuming act of comradeliness an instance of Agape."[1]

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[1] Ulysses on the Liffey (New York: Oxford University Press, A Galaxy Book, 1972), p. 146.

Just as in early Christianity an Agape was a love feast followed by a Eucharistic celebration, so the shelter becomes the scene of a Eucharist. Stephen recognizes Bloom as his Christ, much as the disciples at Emmaus recognized the risen Lord in the breaking of bread: "*Ex quibus*, Stephen mumbled in a noncommittal accent, their two or four eyes conversing, *Christus* or Bloom his name is, or, after all, any other, *secundum carnem*." (643) This sharing of the Eucharist is completed later at Eccles Street when Bloom becomes the "kenotic" Christ of Paul's letter to the Philippians, who "empties himself to assume the condition of a servant," (2:7) that is, "relinquishing his symposiarchal right to the moustache cup . . . he substituted a cup identical with that of his guest and served extraordinarily to his guest and, in reduced measure, to himself the viscous cream ordinarily reserved for the breakfast of his wife Marion (Molly)." (677) The communion is completed as Bloom and Stephen "drank in jocoserious silence Epp's massproduct, the creature cocoa"; in the combining of their names, the consecration's "This is my Body; this is my Blood."

Thus Bloom is introduced and recognized as messiah, and Joyce with the centripetal action of his art begins to allow all the earlier messiah-imagery to center on this unlikely Christ. In the Circe section a voice had uttered the question: "Bloom, are you the Messiah

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ben Joseph or ben David?" Bloom answers darkly with the words of Jesus before Pilate: "You have said it." (495) Immediately Bloom performs a host of signs to prove he is genuine. Then Brini, the Papal Nuncio, intones a parody of the first chapter of Matthew's gospel ending with the words that proclaim Bloom the messiah promised in Isaiah as Emmanuel ("God is with us"). If the messiah is to be a son of David, so is Bloom; he compares his father to David: "Near the end, remembering the king David and the Sunamite, he shared his bed with Athos, faithful after death." (528) Finally there is much imagery of Bloom as the messianic prefigurations, Elijah and Moses.

In fact it is as a new Moses that we see Bloom part with Stephen at the end of Ulysses. Their departure is an "exodus from the house of bondage to the wilderness of inhabitation." (697) Stephen proceeds into the back yard, led by this messianic Bloom who had earlier considered himself a "Light to the Gentiles" (676):

> Lighted Candle in Stick borne by
> BLOOM.
> Diaconal Hat on Ashplant borne by
> STEPHEN. (698)

As they depart the house a psalm is intoned, the same that Dante used in his letter to Can Grande to illustrate the four levels of meaning in the Paradiso—"modus peregrinus: In exitu Israël de Egypto: domus Jacob de populo barbaro." (698) The exodus theme which was central to both the Commedia and Pilgrim's Progress now becomes central to

Ulysses.

But where is the promised land to which this new Moses points Stephen from his wilderness of guilt and betrayal? Where is the redemption promised by this Christic Bloom? If a promised land is anything like Dante's Earthly Paradise, or redemption anything like entrance into Paradise, then Bloom has led Stephen to neither, only to the base of the Mount of Purgatory. This seems to be the best hope offered in Ulysses: to be climbing with a goal in sight, even though it be dim at best.

What is the goal offered by Leopold? The "light shining in the darkness" is the lamp in the window of the waiting Molly Bloom. Below in the garden with their "Pisgah Sight of Palestine"—which recalls Stephen's "Parable of the Plums" in the Aeolus chapter—Bloom elucidates "the mystery of the invisible person" beyond the window with "indirect and direct verbal allusions or affirmations: with subdued affection and admiration: with description: with impediment: with suggestion." (702)

That Molly Bloom should become Stephen's promised land and Bloom the messiah of the New Bloomusalem is perhaps the supreme irony of Stephen's conversion experience. At the end of the Eumaeus episode Stephen had sung the song, "Youth here has End," implying that he has crossed over from youth to maturity in the Agape of the evening.

(663) Stephen and Bloom have fused in a secular Eucharist; they have eaten and drunk towards a secular salvation. When the two finally shake hands, Stephen departs in "the incipient intimations of proximate dawn." (704) All the imagery leads us to believe that Stephen has undergone some sort of resurrection and that the newness of dawn brings the promise of an Easter. The technique of the episode strengthens this judgment. Unlike the end of Portrait where the romantic style of Stephen's adolescence served to evaluate the quality of the experience, here the catechism technique of question and answer reveals an experience which has been impersonalized and objectified. Stephen's former subjectivism has been purged; he has been humbled. We recall Mr. Deasy's advice to Stephen at the beginning of the novel: "To learn one must be humble. But life is the great teacher." (35) We likewise recall that Virgil had to bind a reed—symbolizing humility—around Dante's waist before he could begin his climb through the terraces of Purgatory.

Meanwhile, Molly is trying to get to sleep. In the Penelope monologue it dawns upon the reader that she is everything that Stephen is not. Completely untainted by Jansenistic piety, she thus contains the cure for his case of Dedalus' Complaint with its "divorce between flesh and spirit, between the sensible and the spiritual, that was disintegrating to moral equilibrium." And most important, Molly (who ironically, shares her birthday with the Blessed Virgin) embodies the whole affirmative way of growth, whether it be religious or artistic, a final "yes" that neither the Jesuits nor the Church nor his mother had been able to give him.

Conclusions

This analysis of Stephen's religious experience in Portrait and Ulysses could be extended greatly by resorting to the first two drafts of Portrait in which the narrators are not silenced by Joyce's developed aesthetic of impersonality. Such a last resort, however, is not unlike scavenging among the fragments of discarded film on the cutting-room floor. Portrait's early drafts were edited for a reason, as Joyce himself indicated in Stephen Hero when he said that Stephen "was determined to fight with every energy of soul and body against any possible consignment to what he now regarded as the hell of hells—the region, otherwise expressed, wherein everything is found to be obvious."[1] There would be no room for obvious narrative evaluations in Portrait.

Joyce's two early drafts of Portrait occasionally conflate into the final work and thus provide valuable perspectives. In "The Portrait of the Artist," for

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[1] (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1955), p. 30. All quotations will be numbered in the text according to this edition with the abbreviation SH.

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example, the young artist rejects what he calls the "digestive value of religion."[1] Ultimately, in Portrait and Ulysses, he does reject it and he does not. Without a doubt he rejects Cranly's and Mulligan's compromise with the Irish faith. He refuses to "remain true to the Church because it is our national Church." (SH 64) His cry, "With me all or not at all," (U 582) echoes through both novels.

On the other hand, Stephen does digest the myths and symbols of religion; in Portrait they enter into symbiosis with his artistic consciousness. Thus Cranly can tell Stephen: "It is a curious thing . . . how your mind is supersaturated with the religion in which you say you disbelieve." (P 240) And Stephen can refuse to receive a sacriligious communion with the rationalization: "I fear . . . the chemical action which would be set up in my soul by a false homage to a symbol behind which are massed twenty centuries of authority and veneration." (P 243) In light of this, Hoffman can judge that

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[1] This first version of Portrait was a thousand-word essay dashed off ten years before the novel was completed. Found in Robert E. Scholes and Richard M. Kain, The Workshop of Daedalus: James Joyce and the Raw Materials for "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), pp. 60-68.

"Stephen's rebellion against the Church has not been whole-hearted or final; he is aware still of its mysteries, its elaborate strategies of explanation, its possibly eventual 'righteousness.'"[1] Kristan Smidt adds, changing the focus of his remarks from Stephen to Joyce himself:

> Joyce not only feared that Christianity might be true, he felt intimately that behind the Christian symbols there "are massed twenty centuries of authority and veneration." The forces which held him back and tied him to home and tradition were extremely powerful ones, and he did not just discard his faith as he might have cast aside a worn shirt. He obviously fought for it as he fought for his freedom from it. In the process he was at least convinced of possessing a spiritual soul, and the conviction was always to colour his thoughts and vocabulary.[1]

There is a negative and a positive pole in Stephen's religious experience which he expresses most forcefully in an outburst to Cranly at the end of Portrait:

> I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church; and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning. (247)

The negative pole is thus his rejection of Irish Catholicism with its impersonal God and illegitimate Christ. The positive pole is his desire to express his spirit in unfettered freedom. If our God, as Paul Tillich has suggested, is whatever we see as our "ultimate concern," then Stephen's surely becomes art. The conversion he finally undergoes is to a new life as artist. In the adolescent first fervor of this conversion, paralleling his brief piety after the retreat, he sees himself as a priest of art, "a priest of eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life." (221) A more mature Stephen in Ulysses is less lyrical, but just as devoted to art and the freedom to pursue it. It must be admitted, however, that our view of Stephen qua artist is limited to the brief story he narrates in the Aeolus chapter. It is an epiphany similar to Joyce's own stories in Dubliners. In fact, we do not see Stephen maturing in the fourth moment of his conversion to art. We see only the turning point and the immediate changes.

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[1] James Joyce and the Cultic Use of Fiction (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), p. 25.

Once the turn has been made and artistic experience becomes Stephen's ultimate concern, a marked change takes place in the quality of his consciousness and consequently in the quality of Joyce's narrative technique. In Ulysses Stephen attempts to pour the religious experience of his early life, with all its traditional Christian image and symbol, into solution with the imagery and myths of his artistic vision. In this sense Stephen remains supersaturated with the religion that he has rejected.

The very notion of supersaturation might lead a Bloom into pseudo-scientific musings upon the Wilson Cloud Chamber, heat, pressure, and the possibility of a rain-making machine. But apropos of Stephen being supersaturated with religion—and consequently of Ulysses with religious imagery—it is enough to recall that supersaturated solutions are extremely unstable. Any stirring (Can we read "criticism"?), any dust ("theological criticism"?), any introduction of seed crystals ("comparison with traditional religious imagery"?) causes the excess to separate out. And excess there seems to be; we do not sense this excess so much in Portrait which attempts to plot the curve of the young artist's religious emotions as one of its primary themes. But the vast amount of religious imagery in Ulysses, a novel about two men who "indurated by early domestic training and an inherited tenacity of heterodox resistance professed their disbelief in many orthodox religious, national, social and ethical doctrines" (666), begins to separate out under the stirring of a critical reading. The religious symbols, the sacramental actions, even the biblical references which were altogether appropriate and true in Portrait often appear as mere machinery in Ulysses.

Jesus had described the situation in the parable of the sower, some of whose seed "fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched; and since they had no root they withered away." (Mt 13:5-6) The religious imagery which had flourished in Portrait now withers in Ulysses because it has no roots in belief; it lacks even the vitality of blasphemy. Stephen had signaled the dying process in Portrait immediately after he had turned away from religion when he asked himself: "Did he then love the rhythmic rise and fall of words better than their associations of legend and colour?" (166) The answer is yes, increasingly so.

We have not seen this before. Paul was post-Israelite as Stephen (and Joyce) is post-Christian, yet he did not deny his youth, his religious roots, his citizenship, his nationality; he glories in all of them. Augustine was converted from the paganism of Roman classicism, yet he was not deceived by the apparent need to reject pre-Christian knowledge after conversion; he did not seek to flee but to integrate. Bunyan, however, did flee his past; but he rooted his life in the scripture of his new belief. His imagery has all the strength and truth of the tradition from which he drew them. Dante drew his imagery from both the pagan classics and the Christian traditions; his proleptic view of the former and belief in the latter enabled him to synthesize his whole culture even to the point of operating on the

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four levels of meaning described in his letter to Can Grande.[1]

To find a parallel with Joyce's use of religious imagery we must look for a moment outside the Christian tradition. We find that parallel in Euripides. He like Joyce lived in an increasingly post-religious age. I am not ready to question whether his predecessors, Sophocles or Aeschylus (or even Homer) believed in the gods or myths or religious values they portrayed. But they all were aware of moral and spiritual problems, and respected them. Enter Euripides, artistic genius and revolutionary. Religion had become mythology often enough before his entrance on the scene, but he—as Werner Jaeger describes it—went one step further and used the mythical traditions "as a vehicle for expressing the new realities which he saw."[2] Jaeger tells how the play-going public of Athens was at first disturbed and disgusted by his new method. Surprisingly, the three elements of Euripides' method enumerated by Jaeger could be applied equally well to Stephen (and to Joyce himself): bourgeois realism, rhetoric, and philosophy. As for philosophy, we are all aware of his use of Aquinas, Bruno, and Vico. Concerning bourgeois realism, Jaeger, commenting on Euripides' jarring tone, could just as well have been speaking as an early critic of Ulysses: "Any sensitive taste must be offended by the contrast between the original content of the myth and this new middle-class tone, cold, shrewd, pragmatic, rationalist, sceptical, moralistic, and frankly sentimental."[1]

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[1] Ellmann suggests that these four levels of meaning—the literal, ethical, aesthetic, and anagogic—operate in Ulysses, yet he orphans this brainchild of his in the airline terminal between flights (Ellmann, pp. xii-xiii). Without being able to do it here, I think they could well be illustrated as operative in Portrait, but not in Ulysses. Harry Levin indicates how they might be applied to Finnegans Wake in James Joyce, rev. ed. (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1960), pp. 156-57.

[2] Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, trans. Gilbert Highet, 3 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954-61), 1:343.

But it is in Euripides' rhetoric of sophistry where we find the strongest comparative light playing upon the religious and aesthetic consciousness of Stephen (and the aesthetic achievement of Joyce). That the young artist is also a young sophist first dawns upon the reader just before the retreat in Portrait when Stephen is urged by his schoolmates to ask his questions on the catechism. Questions such as:

> Why was the sacrament of the eucharist instituted under the two species of bread and wine if Jesus Christ be present body and blood, soul and divinity, in the bread alone and in the wine alone? Does a tiny particle of the consecrated bread contain all the body and blood of Jesus Christ

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[1] Ibid., p. 346.

> or a part only of the body and blood? If the wine change into vinegar and the host crumble into corruption after they have been consecrated, is Jesus Christ still present under their species as God and as man? (106)

In the grammar of sophistry, it is only a brief declension from this sort of questioning to the out-and-out scepticism of the following exchange between Stephen and Cranly:

> —Do you believe in the eucharist? Cranly asked.
> —I do not, Stephen said.
> —Do you disbelieve then?
> —I neither believe in it nor disbelieve in it, Stephen answered.
> —Many persons have doubts, even religious persons, yet they overcome them or put them aside, Cranly said. Are your doubts on that point too strong?
> —I do not wish to overcome them, Stephen answered. (239)

Stephen recognizes well enough that he is becoming a sophist. After telling Emma that he was "born to be a monk," he muses on the possibilities: "His own image started forth a profaner of cloister, a heretic Franciscan, willing and willing not to serve, spinning like Gherardino da Borgo San Donnino, a lithe web of sophistry and whispering in her ear." (219-20) Soon others begin to declare publicly that Stephen is a sophist. In the Aeolus episode of Ulysses, for example:

> —You remind me of Antisthenes, the professor said, a disciple of Gorgias, the sophist. It is said of him that none could tell if he were bitterer against others or against himself. He was the son of a noble and a bondwoman. And he wrote a book in which he took away the palm of beauty from Argive Helen and handed it to poor Penelope. (148-49)

A little later in the midst of Stephen's sophomoric

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theorizing upon Hamlet one of his listeners advances a Bunyanesque statement: "The leaning of sophists towards the bypaths of apocrypha is a constant quality. . . . The highroads are dreary but they lead to the town." (195) Finally, after his long discourse is over, Stephen the sophist is confronted:

> —You are a delusion, said roundly John Eglington to Stephen. You have brought us all this way to show us a French triangle. Do you believe your own theory?
>
> —No, Stephen said promptly. (213-14)

In the sphere of religious consciousness, sophistry with its refusal to either believe or disbelieve causes a transvaluation first of religious values and then of the words and images that describe them. Jaeger says of Euripides that "he denies the existence and the power of the gods, but at the same time he presents the gods as real and powerful forces in his plays. Hence the genuine ambiguity of his tragedies, which is sometimes deeply serious and sometimes almost playfully frivolous."[1] This leads him to transvalue a god into a deus ex machina, ultimately the only possible god for the sophist.

Stephen too transvalues such words as "love," "patriotism," "God," and "religion." At the end of Portrait he invokes Daedalus so violently that the machinery groans aloud. In Ulysses his god is "the god Bringforth" (395) and "a shout in the street" (34)—

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[1] Ibid., p. 351.

fitting members of a pantheon which includes Bloom's "hubbub of Phenomenon" (395). These gods demand neither belief nor commitment; they are the machinery of myth and symbol which the artist can crank into place whenever needed. In the essay "A Portrait of the Artist" Joyce described how the prototype of Stephen made pragmatic use of religious imagery, what he called the "digestive value of religion": "It was indeed a long time before this boy understood the nature of that most marketable goodness which makes it possible to give comfortable assent to propositions without ordering one's life in accordance with them."[1]

Thus Euripides and Joyce both use the old religious symbols and myths as rolling-stock for transporting their new ideas. The problem is that as-often-as-not these symbols and myths are unable to bear non-religious freight; they break down into banality or cleverness. What reader of Ulysses has not had a fleeting sense of this during a second or third reading of the novel? What reader, that is to say, who is familiar with the literature of Christian tradition.

But here we must be careful to make a distinction between Joyce's use of religious imagery when his narrative technique is reflecting Stephen's consciousness—here, indeed, comparison with Euripides and resulting negative evaluation seems justified—and when this religious imagery reflects Bloom's. Whereas Stephen has undergone a counter-conversion and his new life is marked by his "non serviam" toward the Church and its tradition, Bloom has undergone no conversion but rather a drifting from Judaism to Protestantism to Catholicism, each step subsuming the earlier steps with no decisive turning toward or away from. Because of this he provides a comic view of religion and religious imagery. In fact, when religious imagery "works" in Ulysses, it is usually because it is a reflection of Bloom's consciousness which seems to act as a comic judgment on Stephen's tragic posing, his adolescent sophistry, and his sophomoric philosophizing.

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[1] Scholes, p. 60.

Bloom is to Stephen what Aristophanes was to Euripides, not by what he says or by how he treats Stephen, but rather by what he is. This comes home in a startling way when one sees the play Ulysses in Nighttown, a stage adaptation of Ulysses by Marjorie Barkentin.[1] The comedy of Bloom's predicament in Bella Cohen's is brilliant when acted out, while Stephen's posturing and precocity comes across as bathos. This bathos serves to weaken the play while at the same time revealing the weakness of Stephen himself. Perhaps if the dramatization had been able to incorporate Bloom's treatment of Stephen in the Eumaeus and Ithaca chapters, instead of ending with the vision of Rudy at the end of the Circe chapter, Stephen's eventual humility might have tempered his earlier pomposity.

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[1] (New York: Random House, 1958).

At the end of the Symposium, Plato has Socrates pronounce the judgment that the true poet must be both a tragedian and a comedian.[1] In Ulysses Joyce is both. He is a Euripides in his handling of Stephen, an Aristophanes in his treatment of Bloom. When he uses religious imagery as Euripides did, it is not convincing; when he uses it as Aristophanes did, it has the vitality of the comic tradition.

I agree with Hoffman's summing up, that "Joyce's greatest decision was that of substituting one mode for another, one context for another." When he substituted an a-Christian mode for the Christian one he acted completely contrary to Augustine, Dante, and Bunyan—which, of course, was his right to do. But it necessarily alienated him from the tradition and imaginative-matrix of Christianity. Hoffman is correct when he says that Joyce was "never very far away from the actual rituals of the Church, always compensating (in the sense of 'allowing') for losses in insight and terminology incurred through his separation from it."[2] It is these "losses in insight and terminology"—a result of Joyce's as well as Stephen's counter-conversion—which I have noted and criticized in his use of religious imagery in Ulysses.

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[1] Symp. 223d, quoted in Jaeger, 1:360.

[2] Hoffman, p. 43.

Since our study of conversion has spanned the length of Christian tradition, I am tempted to postscript the judgment of that tradition towards those who apostasize through counter-conversion. T. S. Eliot sums it up in "Choruses from 'The Rock'":

> O weariness of men who turn from GOD
> To the grandeur of your mind and the glory of your action,
> To arts and inventions and daring enterprises,
> To schemes of human greatness thoroughly discredited,
> Binding the earth and the water to your service,
> Exploiting the seas and developing the mountains,
> Dividing the stars into common and preferred,
> Engaged in devising the perfect refrigerator,
> Engaged in working out a rational morality,
> Engaged in printing as many books as possible,
> Plotting of happiness and flinging empty bottles,
> Turning from your vacancy to fevered enthusiasm
> For nation or race or what you call humanity;
> Though you forget the way to the Temple,
> There is one who remembers the way to your door:
> Life you may evade, but Death you shall not.
> You shall not deny the Stranger.[1]

Perhaps Eliot's judgment is too harsh to apply to Joyce; it flows from his own experience as a convert who had wandered the wasteland of counter-conversion and finally turned to climb the mountain of conversion. Its very harshness reveals the fact that convert and apostate stand on different sides of conversion, as distant from each other as Egypt was from the Promised Land. Though the artists of both lands can admire the artistic achievements of each other, can even share religious imagery in an ironic mode, yet the artistic achievement of each country stands as a judgment upon the beliefs of the other. Joyce could praise the style of Newman, the aesthetics of Aquinas, the poetry of Dante, the imagery of the Psalms, but his fascination with heresiarchs and sophists seems more than mere erudition. These latter were his countrymen and in lucid moments he realized it. His counter-conversion was not a simple lapse nor a pose, but a choice of a new life which was as genuinely—and as ambiguously—post-Christian and secular as Augustine's early life had been pre-Christian and pagan.

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[1] Collected Poems 1909-1935 (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), p. 167.

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EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

The lump of experience, as we said in the Introduction, precedes the work of art. Undefined, unshaped, ready to be fashioned by the artist, this lump of experience is the stuff that dreams—and fiction—are made of. The dream—and the fiction—can be understood only by careful consideration of the technique that does the defining, the shaping, and the fashioning.

The experience of conversion is just one lump which the artist may or may not integrate into his works. If he is writing autobiography, he will; if fiction, he may. In this study we have considered three writers who did both: first described their conversions or counter-conversions autobiographically, and then in subsequent works dealt with them fictionally.

The artist is always compelled to write a metaphor for his experience. Literal description is not enough. So the prophets and the psalmists wrote of conversion in the metaphors of a new covenant or a new exodus or God replacing man's heart of stone with a heart of flesh. Paul seems too much the theologian to write an extended metaphor of conversion. Unless, of course, the road to Damascus episode is not a literal event but a metaphor

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for a more pedestrian experience. Augustine appears less as an artist than a philosopher in the Confessions; we tend to consider his narrative of conversion in the garden at Milan as more literal than metaphorical. But he did write his metaphor of conversion in the City of God.

Dante, as we have seen, subsumed all the former metaphors of conversion into one sustained artistic vision. In the Commedia he combined the biblical metaphor of the exodus with the classical descent into Hades and the apocalyptic ascent to Heaven. His imagination was so vast, his achievement so towering, that Bunyan and Joyce seem derivative in comparison. Their metaphors for conversion and counter-conversion depend less on originality of metaphor than on technical excellence and variations of culture and theology. What all three shared was the experience of conversion and the need to express it in the fullness of their artistry. We might even be tempted to generalize and say that artists who have undergone the rending of conversion or counter-conversion must appropriate or assimilate the experience through repetition. Thus they create literary works which recreate this experience and its aftermath with different techniques and from various points of view. This leads to some sort of equilibrium, call it what you like: James' "integration of the divided self," Lonergan's "self-appropriation," Paul's "maturity in Christ," Augustine's "confession," and so forth. At any rate, Dante, Bunyan, and Joyce seemed to realize that their autobiographical descriptions of conversion were inadequate. Only by repeating the experience in the metaphors of fiction could they catch the sweep and the structure and the emotion of their changes of heart.

Ours has been a specialized study, directed solely to these changes of heart. Thus we have passed over many excellencies in these writers which have made them giants on the literary landscape. On the other hand, by so specializing our approach we have noted aspects which have not been treated elsewhere, or if treated, only briefly and outside any historical or theological context.

In this study many roads have diverged from our path of a descriptive consideration of religious conversion. Like Robert Frost's persona in his poem "The Road Not Taken," I have been sorry I could not travel more of them and remain one traveler. But every journey into the yellow wood of literature opens new paths for exploration, and we must be satisfied by concluding with a reading of the signposts at the crossroads.

Running off in one direction is the well-worn path to the psychology of religion; its ruts are cut deep from the cargo freighted that way by William James and his colleagues. We have resisted the temptation to explore their uncritical mistaking of imaginative literature for literal case studies. Their lack of sensitivity to imagery, rhetoric, fiction—to technique in general—leads to a country far from the Narnia of our travels.

In another direction lies the history of theology. We looked that way briefly as we considered the different models of conversion which resulted from the theology of Paul or Augustine or Pelagius or Aquinas or Calvin or Jansenius. This path deserves more travel.

Other roads run off towards the valleys of comparative religion and the mountains of ascetical theology. The former have been mapped by Nock in his attempts to distinguish the unique character of Christian conversion among the welter of pagan and mystery religions; the latter was climbed by Dunne in his discussions of man's search for mediation.

But one road which has paralleled our own is that of structuralism. We have often found ourselves fellow-travelers with the structuralists; in fact, our use of their terminology throughout this study seems to signal the possibility of shifting our viewpoint from how artists present the experience and the literary patterning of conversion to how the structure of conversion remains the same despite the cultural and historical differences of the convert-artists who experience and describe religious conversion. We have noted in some detail how the religious experience of conversion has been patterned by various biblical authors and by later writers of the stature of Augustine, Dante, Bunyan, and Joyce. We could, of course, have focused on many others. No doubt the reader has already been reminded of other Christian artists.

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Shifting to a structuralist viewpoint we might seek a grammar of conversion, one which is implied in every narration of the experience: be it theological, autobiographical, or fictional. We recognize, of course, that this is exactly what we were doing when we discussed the four-moment structure of conversion. As it emerged again and again in the prophets, Paul, Augustine, and so forth, we noted that it was more than a coincidental structure, but rather a constant one. In fact, we soon found that when one or another of the moments was omitted or aborted the result was a new or recurring heresy.

Not only did the four-moment structure emerge as a constant, but certain imagery also emerged in each moment. Thus, for example, the first moment always served to cluster such images as straying from the straight road, wandering in desert places, finding oneself lost in a wilderness or dark wood or destructive city. Northrup Frye and many of the structuralists would explain these recurring images by saying that they flow from myth and the mythic consciousness of the artist. When we understand that for Frye the Bible is "the main source for undisplaced myth in our tradition," we realize that in our first two chapters on the theology of conversion in the Old and New Testaments we were examining the source of the grammar of conversion.[1]

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[1] Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 140.

In the Bible we found on the one hand the imagery—for Frye, the archetypal symbols—of conversion, and on the other the principles which structure conversion itself.

Examining the myths of conversion in the manner of the structuralists, we might present the following schema of the four moments of conversion. We include it here more by way of a conclusion than the beginning of a total structuralist study which is beyond our present scope:

I. Convert separated from God
    A. Captive in an alien city or country
    B. Strays from the straight road
    C. Finds himself or dreams himself lost in a dark wood or wilderness
    D. Wanders in the desert

II. God calls wanderer to turn or return
    A. Appears in a blinding vision
    B. Sends a guide
    C. Addresses wanderer by spoken word or in scripture
    D. Makes certain promises

III. Convert responds to God
    A. Turns away from former life
    B. Undertakes journey filled with obstacles
    C. Begins preaching or repeating God's message
    D. Changes heart—heart of flesh for heart of stone

IV. Convert forms new relationship with God
    A. Contracts a new covenant
    B. Takes on a new name
    C. Enters into a new city or land
    D. Is lifted up into Heaven—apocalyptic imagery

These images and functions are familiar since most of them have recurred in each of the conversion narratives which we have examined. Can we speak then of a tradition of conversion literature? I think we can. We might even suggest that there is a genre of conversion fiction just as

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there is, say, a genre of picaresque fiction. We cannot explore this suggestion to the extent that it deserves, but we can open up the possibilities by presenting the features which seem to be present. In so doing we are following the method used by Claude Guillén in his structuralist study of the picaresque in Literature as System.[1] Without going into detail we might isolate eight features found in a genre of conversion:

1. The convert is an alien, a pilgrim, a wanderer, an atheist or agnostic
2. The account is in the form of a pseudo-autobiography, narrated by the convert; or in the form of an allegory, narrated by the convert-as-dreamer
3. The narrator's view is partial at first, but grows more omniscient
4. The narrator is a learner, an observer, who puts new experiences to the test
5. The spiritual level of existence is stressed—values, goals, commitment
6. The convert observes a number of spiritual conditions and attitudes
7. The convert moves horizontally through the geographical world and vertically through the spiritual
8. The episodes are joined together by a journey or quest[2]

Such a list of characteristics is valuable in several ways. From the historical perspective, shifts in one

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[1] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

[2] These eight features are adapted from the treatment of Guillén's work in Robert Scholes' Structuralism in Literature (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 141.

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or more of the characteristics might signal extra-literary changes in theological doctrine, for instance, of the concept of man's status in the world or of his relationship with God. From the perspective of literary criticism, this list of features might be set next to the features of similar genres: those of quest romances, novels of education (Bildungsroman), or picaresque novels. Unfortunately, valuable as such comparisons might be, they take us down roads beyond our present study; fortunately, however, the present study has opened up the roads to such comparisons.

A final road also diverges from that of our present way, that of the relationship between literature and theology. This relationship has been implicit at every step of the way, but any thorough attempt to make it explicit certainly diverges from our purpose. We can simply observe that we have focused both literary and theological criticism upon religious conversion. For example, the biblical treatment of conversion which we outlined in the first part of the study presented us with a theology of conversion on the one hand, and a literary patterning of it on the other. Later we examined Augustine's Confessions in which he both thought as a theologian and wrote as an artist. We saw the same creative process repeated, mutatis mutandis, in Dante and Bunyan.

It would take far more study than we can afford here to judge whether or not the artist is a theologian while he is operating as an artist; or vice versa, whether or not the theologian is an artist when he is operating as a theologian. With Augustine, Dante, and Bunyan the two roles are so functionally interpenetrated that such statements seem absurd. Likewise absurd would be an attempt to judge whether our criticism of these writers has been more literary than theological. Reflecting on our methods in this study, we might conclude that whenever a critic treats biblical themes and imagery in literature, or examines the literary patterning of religious experience, or traces the structure of a theological doctrine in narrative fiction, he is operating as both theologian and literary critic. Thus, the road we have chosen to follow in exploring religious conversion is one that has invited, even demanded, a "theological-literary" critique; the roads we have avoided were those which would have either removed the hyphen or replaced one side or the other of it with "psychological" or "historical" or "structural."

Here we can abandon our metaphor of many roads leading off into a yellow wood and suggest that conversion is a heuristic structure like an inverted cone opening upwards from the vertex. Our insight that there are four moments of conversion, each containing certain invariable imagery, is at vertex of the heuristic. Further studies can only move upwards and outwards from this starting point.

The beginning of this movement was in the area of Old and New Testament theology. This we surveyed in Part One of this study. The next area was in the history of conversion, an area which we touched upon in our treatment of Augustine, but which also demands further studies into the Fathers, Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, Luther, Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, John Henry Newman, Thomas Merton, and many more. Each of these men stood in a special relationship to his historical milieu: the effects of the milieu were present in each experience of conversion. The dialectic which we found implicit between Dante and Bunyan and Joyce would also emerge between each of these others.

The movement into the area of literature is even farther upwards and outwards, even though in this study we moved into literary embodiments of conversion as quickly as possible. Other studies could be made into the expressions of conversion as found in the poetry of John Donne, George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and T. S. Eliot as well as into conversion accounts in drama and the novel.

Beyond the literary embodiments are more abstract ventures into the psychological, philosophical, and theological implications of conversion: a study of conversion, for example, in terms of the epistemology of Bernard Lonergan whose four levels of insight—experience, understanding, judgment, and decision—seem on the surface, at least, to correspond to the four moments of conversion. His own work has increasingly dealt with conversion; he treats it at length as "foundational reality" in his latest book, Method in Theology.[1]

In any good heuristic the movement outward and upward comprises an endless succession of higher viewpoints. At present my intention has been to survey the theology of conversion and the literary patterning of it found in Dante, Bunyan, and Joyce while at the same time preparing access to further viewpoints. If the study has sometimes seemed obvious, it is because our task has been descriptive and foundational. If it has seemed too vast, it is because the contours of the subject had to be mapped from Jeremiah to Joyce if the vastness of religious conversion were to be appreciated. And if it now seems incomplete, that is because it is. Further and higher viewpoints have been implied throughout; countless paths lead off into the yellow wood of religious conversion.

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[1] Lonergan, pp. 267-93 passim.

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